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"Hospitality II"

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Thematic Section

Introduction

Anikó Radvánszky

The concept of hospitality, as explored through various disciplinary lenses, offers fertile ground for philosophical inquiry and practical reflection. The second issue of Pázmány Papers brings together a collection of articles that delve into Jacques Derrida's seminal ideas on hospitality and their manifold implications across ethics, politics, art, and society. Unified by a thematic focus, the contributors provide a multi-faceted examination of the tension between unconditional and conditional hospitality, as well as its theoretical and applied dimensions.

Fernanda Benardo's opening article, "Hospitality – The Pulse and the Pulsation of Deconstruction", positions Derrida's deconstruction as a philosophical idiom uniquely suited to addressing the aporias of hospitality. Building on the legacy of Emmanuel Levinas, Bernardo discusses the intersection of ethics, law, and politics, highlighting Derrida's interrogation of the "impossible" as a condition for meaningful engagement with the other. Her analysis underscores the primacy of interruption, openness, and unconditionality in Derridean thought, challenging traditional notions of sovereignty and the nation-state.

In "Hospitality (and the) Inhuman", Giustino De Michele extends this exploration by juxtaposing Derrida's and Levinas's philosophies with contemporary bioethical and migration challenges. De Michele interrogates the "inhuman" dimensions of hospitality, critiquing Levinas's humanism and examining Derrida's contributions to a broader, non-anthropocentric ethics. His reflections are particularly pertinent in light of global migration crises, illustrating how deconstructive ethics can inform policies that transcend purely legal frameworks.

János Barcsák's "Undecidability and the Reference of Formal Systems" bridges philosophy and formal logic by drawing parallels between Derrida's concept of undecidability and Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem. This article offers a unique perspective, suggesting that Derridean deconstruction can provide innovative approaches to longstanding questions about reference and truth in formal systems. Barcsák's analysis enriches the dialogue between analytic and continental traditions, showing the utility of Derridean thought in unexpected domains.

Róbert Smid's "The Host Hosted: Hospitality and Recognition in Kleist's *Amphitryon*" turns to literature, using Derrida's aporias of hospitality as a framework for analyzing Heinrich von Kleist's play. Smid examines the interchangeable roles of host and guest, revealing how the play dramatizes the paradoxes of conditional and unconditional hospitality. His study illuminates the inherent instability of identity and the ethical demands of openness to the unknown, which remain central to Derridean ethics.

Finally, Petra Egri's "The Derridean (Un)hostility of Fashion" takes deconstruction into the realm of fashion theory. Exploring the intersection of aesthetics, ethics, and temporality, Egri applies Derridean concepts to the practices of contemporary designers like Martin Margiela. Her work highlights fashion as a site of resistance and re-signification, demonstrating how the ephemeral and performative aspects of clothing resonate with the broader themes of deconstruction.

This issue marks the second thematic section in *Pázmány Papers* dedicated to the topic of hospitality. It builds on the discourse initiated in the first volume, uncovering new dimensions of the concept. Together, these articles present a compelling dialogue between Derridean thought and diverse fields of inquiry. By weaving together philosophy, literature, formal systems, and cultural critique, this issue invites readers to reconsider hospitality not only as an ethical imperative but also as a dynamic framework for understanding the complexities of human and non-human relations. The contributors' insights underscore the enduring relevance of deconstruction in addressing the pressing challenges of our time, from global migration to the ethics of design and beyond.

Hospitality – the *Pulse and the Pulsation* of Deconstruction

Fernanda Bernardo[1]

Abstract

With the title "Hospitality – the *Pulse and the Pulsation* of Deconstruction," this article tries to present and to highlight Derrida's Deconstruction as a philosophical idiom, trying to emphasise its singularity – its singularity as an idiom of philosophical thought as well as the singularity of its thought of hospitality, advocating it as the bearer of Lights for the urgency of a new "world" of Enlightenment to come.

Keywords

Derrida, deconstruction, hospitality, justice, idiom

> *"Everything begins with welcoming"*
> (J. Derrida 2022, 70)

> *"I try to think the possibility of the impossibility"*
> (J. Derrida 2012a, 196)

As part of the admirative and studious fidelity of this "in memoriam" to Jacques Derrida, dedicated to the person, the thought and the work of Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), which the University of Pécs has been organising, for years already, under the attentive and wise supervision of Professor Jolán Orbán – whom I would like to warmly salute, thank and wholeheartedly congratulate for this touching and (philosophically) important initiative – I would like to begin today by noting and presenting Derrida's Deconstruction as *a philosophical idiom*, as *a philosophical idiom of thought*, trying to emphasise its *singularity* – its *singularity* as a *philosophical idiom of thought* as well as the *singularity* of its *thought on the subject of hospitality* and of its implications on the *subjective*, the *juridical* and the *political* as, in this year's "*in memoriam*", we will be *above*

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all focusing on *Hospitalité* (Paris: ed. du Seuil, 2022), the second volume of Jacques Derrida's 1996–1997 *Seminar*[2], which has just been published and which, above all, gives us Derrida reading, re-thinking and *counter-signing* Levinas.

Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) was described by Derrida as a "great thinker of hospitality" (Derrida 2022, 21) – or more precisely, as a thinker of "*l'éthicité de l'éthique*" (Derrida and Labarrière 1986, 70) ["the ethicity of ethics"] and as a thinker of the *ethics of hospitality*, indeed of ethics *as* hospitality (Derrida 2022, 22–25), whose arch-originality he describes as able *to deduce* – it is, in fact, his own word: *déduire* [*to deduce*] (Levinas 1991, 239. My emphasis) – a *law* and a *politics of hospitality* (Derrida 2022, 24–25). In doing so, he audaciously thought and allowed us to think about "the law beyond the law" and "the politics beyond the politics" (Derrida 1996a, 76) designed and conceived to extend beyond the strict sovereignty of the nation-state, thereby proposing a re-elaboration of the singular relationship between ethics (in the guise of *meta-* or *hyper*-ethics), law and politics. A proposal that signals the "extravagant hypothesis" (Abensour 1998, 55–84) of Emmanuel Levinas, in the pertinent words of Miguel Abensour – a hypothesis *in a certain way* also shared by Jacques Derrida, by the *indeconstructibility* of his Deconstruction as a *philosophical thought*: *indeconstructibility* drawing, let us remember, upon the hyperbolism (see Derrida 1996b, 82) of its *meta*-onto-phenomeno-logical, *meta*-anthropo-onto-logical and *meta*-onto-theo-logical register as *thought* – the register of the *impossibility* or the *unconditionality* that breaks with the onto-phenomeno-logical themes of the waiting *horizon*[3] and of the *als Struktur* that *re*-thinks the traditional and dominant onto-phenomeno-logical register of philosophy in *aporetic* terms. This *aporeticity* embodies the very difficulty of Deconstruction – accustomed, as we generally are, to the comfort of ideas and theories, this *aporeticity* is at the heart of the difficulty of understanding Deconstruction as a *philosophical thought*: a *philosophical thought* that marks, along with the primacy and the excess of *unconditionality or impossibility*, the distinction between *unconditionality* and *conditionality* or *sovereignity*, as well as their relationship and the *hiatus* that feeds both their relationship and their distinction. *Hiatus* marks the *interruption* in which attention to otherness breathes – attention to otherness, i.e., to the other as other or to what happens, to the event of arrival

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[2] Jacques Derrida's seminar on hospitality took place from 1995 to 1997 at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS) in Paris, as part of a series of seminars under the general title of "Questions de la Responsabilité", which began in 1991 and was interrupted in 2003.

[3] "I am also [with Levinas] in favour of suspending the horizon but, precisely for this reason, in saying this, I am no longer a phenomenologist. [...] when I accept the necessity of suspending the horizon, I am no longer a phenomenologist" (Derrida 2012a, 202).

[*arrivance*]. *Hiatus* is the sign of "*à-venir*" ["*to-come*"]. Let us just remember that, in *Circonfession* (1991), Derrida says that it is the task of Deconstruction "to make the interruption readable" (Derrida 1991, 53) and, in *La Conférence de Heidelberg (1988)*, Derrida says that *interruption* is the very condition of the relationship to the other *as other* (2014a, 90–91).

I must confess that this is my preliminary goal and a task that I consider most fundamental and of the utmost urgency – because philosophy is always linked to an idiom – namely the task of thinking about and presenting Deconstruction as a *philosophical idiom* linked to the name, the thought and the work of Jacques Derrida: and all this without thereby reifying Deconstruction in a theory (i.e., in a theoretical-systematic philosophy). It is important also to bear in mind that, building on the work of Kant and Heidegger, but in a very different way, Derrida not only distinguishes between *thought* and *philosophy* (Derrida and Roudinesco 2001, 200) – (*philosophy* always being connected with "the" *logocentric metaphysics* of the presence and of anthropocentric subjectivity, and *thought* being always thought as a *pass-act-ivity experience* of the event and as event) – but also reminds us that *thought*, and therefore the thinker-philosopher, is always, i.e., *every time*, in every *here-and-now* (Derrida 1997a, 29)*,* under the blow of time and then at the *limit and/or threshold*. On the very abyss of the threshold and alone[4]. Without *pathos*, the (*a-subjective*) *singularity* is always combined, by Derrida, with *separation*, *secrecy* and *solitude* – a certain kind of *solitude. The solitude* of finitude – of uniqueness or of the creaturely condition. Hence the *auto-bio-graphic*, or more precisely the *auto-bio-thanato-hetero-graphic*, and the *messianic* or *prophetic* (Derrida 1997a, 26; prophético-poétique/ prophét(h)ique) register of the thoughtful and performative writing. Hence also the courage of *thought* – of *this thought of time* (*fois, vicis*) or of the *event, of that which happens* – always on the threshold of resistance and of re-invention.

An *idiom* with a *meta*-onto-logic, *meta*-phenomeno-logic, *meta*-anthropo-logic and *meta*-onto-theo-logic profile, endowed with specific (theoretical) presuppositions which, in the tradition of Plato's "*hyperbolè... epekeina tes ousias*" and, above all, in the one of "*en diaphéron héautô*" (the "one differing in itself") of Heraclitus, sketches out Jacques Derrida's avowed taste for the "hyperbolism" that dictates, magnetises

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[4] On the threshold, on the abyss of the threshold or on the threshold as abyss, where the heir-philosopher – just like the "I" – at every moment, and under the impact of the moment, must stand, "I am alone", an "I" is always alone, that is to say, absolved, *absolutus*, detached, and therefore, in the world as in the history of philosophy, there is only "more than one alone": solitude, a certain solitude, is the condition of the singularity, even the uniqueness, of each and every one. It should also be noted that for Derrida the threshold does not take the form of the ground, the solid, the founding solidity, the foundation – drawing the line beyond the ontological or phenomenological register, the threshold always has the appearance of an abyss: "The abyss is not the bottom, the original foundation (*Urgrund*), of course, nor the bottomless depth (*Ungrund*) of some hidden bottom. The abyss, if there is one, is that there is more than one ground, more than one solid, and more than one threshold". "Plus d'un seul seul", "(No)More than one alone" (Derrida 2008, 443).

and gives rhythm to his *thought* – those of *différance* designated by the *quasi-names* of *messianic* or *messianicity* and *khôra*, this "totally indifferent space" "that creates a place for the taking place" (2012a, 203), in the philosopher's words.

"Historical" *quasi-names*, necessarily, as Derrida points it out in *Foi et Savoir* (2000), beyond signalling the messianic untimeliness of time, also point to the dissociation between now [*maintenant*] and the present [*présent*], thus directing our attention to the disjunction of the instant, of each instant, and also *the very duplicity of the origin* – (Derrida 2000, 30; 1993a; 1993b; 1994). This *duplicity* signals in turn either *the origin in deconstruction* (Derrida 1967, 90) or the technicality and metaphoricity from the origin, either the *double source* or the double affiliation (Greek-Abrahamic) of western civilisation (Derrida 1992a, 267). Each of them is also double in itself, that is, each is non-identical to itself:

> Philosophy has never been the responsible deployment of a single original assignment linked to a single language or to the place of a single people. Philosophy does not have a single memory. Under its Greek name and in its European memory, it has always been bastard, hybrid, grafted, multilinear, polyglot, and we must adjust our practice of the history of philosophy, of history and of philosophy to this reality, which was also a *chance* and remains more than ever a *chance*. (Derrida 1997b, 33)

This is *a double filiation* which, as Derrida says in *L'animal que donc je suis* (Derrida 2006, 69), although weaving together two narratives of heterogeneous status and origin, draws two symptomatic translations of the living together in the world.

And it is precisely from this *hyperbological*[5]*,* signalled by the indeconstructibility of this *meta-* (*meta*-onto-logic, *meta*-phenomeno-logic, *meta*-anthropo-logic and *meta*-onto-theo-logic) register of *thought,* that all *the impossibles* or all *the unconditionals* spring up – or it is this *hyperbological* that dictates and drafts all *the impossibles* or all *the unconditionals* of Derridean Deconstruction in its condition of *impossible thought* or *impossible experience of the impossible* (Derrida 1987, 27) barely *im-possible*: i.e., justice, pardon, responsibility, decision, blessing, democracy to-come, translation, gift, death, hospitality, ... the *gift of hospitality*, precisely, thought as a *tending towards* (*tendere, Greek teinô*) – (see Derrida 2022, 145), as a careful attention, an openness (*heterological* or *heteronomic* openness[6]) and *ex-position* to the other, to the unexpected and surprising

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[5] The *hyperbological* is the conjugation of the *law of paradox*, cf. (Derrida 1987, 595).

[6] "Heteronomy is", as Derrida notes it, "visitation before reception" (Derrida 2022, 157).

visitation of the other *whoever or whatever he or she may be*, since, for Derrida, "*tout autre est tout autre*" ["every other is absolutely other"].[7]

Anarchic, unconditional and hyperbolic, *hospitality* is then the welcoming attention to what happens for or to the other, to the very other [*tout autre*], in its condition, not of a guest, but of an unpredictable *visitor* (Derrida 1987, 53)*,* of an *absolute arrival* – and as such, as the *unconditional welcoming* of the other, *hospitality* configures what Derrida calls (with capitals) *the Law* of hospitality. Of *unconditional hospitality*! And such *hospitality* – which Derrida will call pure, absolute, unconditional, just, poetic/po-ethical, messianic, and, in the lexicon of Lévinas, infinite (see Derrida 2022, 184), or even of *visitation*[8] – and such *hospitality*, as I was saying, not only configures the structure of the subjectivity of the subject but also configures, as gesture or as attitude, Deconstruction itself in its condition of *thought of différance* or of *absolute otherness* (Derrida 2012b, 26), outlining at the same time both the hyper-ethical[9] and the hyper-just register (as well as the [already] hyper-political[10] register) that dictates and magnetises its "*pas au-delà*" (cf. *Parages*, 1986): trace of the untimely surprise of the *impossible*, or of the other *as other*, as the very condition of the possible, this register is, in a saying of Derrida from *Papier Machine* (2001), "the drive or the pulse" (see Derrida 2001, 308) of Deconstruction itself – *the drive or the pulse,* i.e., the breathing, the life, the *over-life* [*sur-vie*] of Deconstruction. A *sur-vie* that, beyond the *auto-bio-thanato-hetero-graphic* register, stresses both the *hyperbologic* and the *rhythmotypy* that magnetises it and traces its *loco-comotion* (Derrida and Malabou 1999, 40, 42) drawing its attention to the blow of the moment – always "out of joint" –, and so its vocation to resistance, to dissidence and to re-invention. Hence Derrida's confessing *to have always dreamt of resistance* – (see Derrida 1996b, 39) and *to have lived his death in writing*: "If I had invented my writing," he says in *Apprendre à vivre enfin* (2005), "I would have done it like an endless revolution." (Derrida 2005).

In fact, in distinguishing *thought* from *philosophy*, there is in the *thought* and in the work of Jacques Derrida an equation of *thought*, of the *courageous and intransigent unconditionality* of *thought* either with *ethics* – however understood, not as an area or as

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[7] "Tout autre est tout autre" [...] he first fell, dare I say it, like a stone in Levinas's garden..." (Derrida and Malabou 1999, 263).

[8] Following his distinction of the *face* from the *phenomenon*, Lévinas says that «the epiphany of the face is *visitation*» (Levinas 1988b, 194).

[9] "[...] beyond law, debt and duty, it would be necessary to think rationally a hyper-ethics or a hyper-politics that doesn't just act 'in accordance with duty (*pflichtmässig*)' or even [...] 'for pure duty' [...]. This hyper-ethics or this hyper-politics goes unconditionally beyond the economic circle of duty or of the task [...] of the debt to reappropriate or to cancel" (Derrida 2003b, 210).

[10] "The thought of politics has always been a thought of differ*a*nce, and the thought of differance has also always been a thought of politics, of the contours and of the limits of politics" (2003b, 64).

a speciality of the philosophical *corpus,* but, because of its meta-ontology, in terms of *hyper-ethics* or of "hyperbolic ethics": "the 'hyperbolic ethic' [is] an ethic above ethics" (Derrida 2012c, 35) – with *justice* (see Derrida 2004, 48) – and with *hospitality.* The thought of *différance* is a *thought of justice and* a *thought of hospitality*, *as hospitality* and *as justice* and, in its intransigent *unconditionality*, *hospitality* is *ethics* itself. What we can also understand as being the ethical, the *hyper-ethical* scope of *thought* itself – or that should inspire the demanding probity of thinking in all areas of knowledge, arts and technologies. A relevant passage in *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!* (1996) emphasises this (hyper-)ethical scope of the *unconditionality of thought*, of *this thought* – "[...] the end of morality (that was the greatest naivety)" (Derrida 1983, 59–60), as much as of *culture,* of the culture of cultures and of *hospitality* itself:

> *To cultivate the ethics of hospitality* – isn't this language moreover tautological? Despite all the perversions that threaten it, we don't even have to cultivate an ethics of hospitality. Hospitality is culture itself, and it is not an ethics among others. Insofar as it touches on *ethos*, i.e. the dwelling, the home, the familiar place to stay as much as the way of being there, the way of relating to oneself and to others, to others as one's own or as strangers, *ethics is hospitality*, it is in every way co-extensive with the experience of hospitality, however we open it up or limit it. (Derrida 1997c, 41–42)

Let us emphasise it: it is not only in relation to *justice* (see Bernardo 2021), to the *unconditionality* of *justice* (in the sense distinct from law [legal system, juridico-political devices] and thought, in a certain trace of Levinas [Cf. Derrida 2017, 79], in terms of *an absolute relation to the absolutely other, i.e., to the other as other, separated or secret*), that Jacques Derrida has understood as defining Deconstruction – "*Deconstruction is justice*" [Derrida 1994, 35], he said in *Force de loi* (1994) in the context of a colloquium with American jurists from Cardozo Law School*,* linking his work with Critical Legal Theory in the United States. He does exactly the same with the motif of *hospitality* – *hospitality* which, moreover, he holds to be inseparable from a *thought of justice* and which he thinks originally as a *gift* (and not as a *duty*[11] or a *right* – a *gift* which, moreover, *gives what it does not have* (Derrida 2012a, 195). In *Hospitality II*, Derrida very explicitly announces *hospitality* as a *name* and/or as an *exemplary experience* of Deconstruction itself: as a questioning of the *proper* [*propre*], of the *same*, of the *one*, of the *home* [*chez-soi*], of the *oikos*, of *ownership*, of *appropriation*, of "*presence to*

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[11] "[…] pure ethics begins beyond law, beyond duty and debt. [...] It is therefore necessary to do duty beyond duty, to have to go beyond law, tolerance, conditional hospitality, economy, etc.", [Derrida and Habermas 2003, 193].

oneself", in short, of *oikonomy* and of *ipséity* or *cratic sovereignty* (i.e., one and indivisible), so central in *logocentric metaphysics*. *Hospitality* is a *name* and/or an *exemplary experience* of Deconstruction itself (as an *impossible thought of the impossible)*. Let us listen to him – it is in the fifth session of the seminar, the one dated 8 January 1997:

> […] hospitality, the experience, the apprehension, the exercise of impossible hospitality, of hospitality as the possibility of the impossible [...] is the exemplary experience of deconstruction itself, when it is or does what it has to do and to be, that is to say, the experience of the impossible. *Hospitality is a name or an example of deconstruction.* [...] Hospitality is the deconstruction of home [*chez soi*], deconstruction is the hospitality to the other, to the other than oneself, to the other of "one's other", to an other who is beyond all "one's other" (Derrida 2022, 152).

I emphasise – "*Hospitality is a name or an example of deconstruction*". And I emphasise it in order to point out that the "beautiful rainbow of hospitality", as Edmond Jabès calls it, this major sign of humanity, of culture and of civilisation – "Civilisation was born with hospitality" (de Villepin 2016, 564) – as much as of risk, of danger and of promise of re-invention and of "future" [*avenir*] – not only outline the singularity of the *meta*-onto-phenomeno-logical silhouette of Deconstruction in its condition of *thought,* of *thought of the différance, of the trace or of the absolute otherness* – by outlining the opening to the other and/or to the to-come [*à-venir*][12] – but also draws the profile, that is, and in the Levinasian lexicon, the very *uncondition* of the *subjectivity of the subject* or, in the Derridean lexicon, of the a-*subjective* or *différante singularity* (Derrida 1992b, 277): in fact, *already always* under the elective call of an *ab-solu* (*ab-solus*) other, held to be the "*first comer*" or "the unplanned, unforeseeable, unpredictable, unexpected visitor" (Derrida 2022, 184). In his "*pass-act-ivité*" (see Derrida 2009, 58), the "subject", always late, always arriving late, and therefore always subject, is for Derrida, in an echo of Levinas's "subjectivity-substitution" (see Derrida 2022, 199), *arch-originary* and *unconditionally* a *guest*[13] – or rather a *host-hostage*[14] of the other in the terminology of *Totalité et Infini* (1961) and in that of *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*: "The self

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[12] In "Abraham, l'autre", Derrida speaks of thinking or of writing as "a hospitality to the event and to the arrival of the arriving (a messianicity without messianism), that is to say, to the to-come. The to-come, that is to say, the other" (Derrida 2003a, 41).

[13] Recalling that the question of translation is intimately linked to that of hospitality, Derrida will point out that, in his idiom, the word *host* means both the *invited*, received or welcomed *guest* and the *inviting host*, the one who receives or welcomes.

[14] "The subject is a guest" (Lévinas 1961, 334), "the subject is hostage" – "[...] this hostage substitution – it is the subjectivity and the uniqueness of the subject" (Lévinas 1988a, 142, 158).

is hostage from top to bottom, more ancient than the Ego, before principles. [...] It is because of the hostage condition that there can be pity, compassion, forgiveness and closeness in the world. […] The condition of hostage is not the limit case of solidarity, but the condition of all solidarity." (Lévinas 1988a, 150)

Insistently, Derrida emphasises it: it is always already as *host*, always already *chez-soi-chez-l'autre* – and not as a proper or a master of oneself and of one's house – that the "subject" welcomes the other in his or her condition of unexpected *visiting* [*guest*], of absolute arrival or, in the Levinasian lexicon, of "face" – "The epiphany of the face is visitation" (Lévinas 1972, 50; Derrida 2022, 80). In Levinas, "face" (the means of another's *revelation*) always combines with "visit" and "visitation" (Lévinas 1972, 153). And because of this, it is always while harassed and marked by the other that the self identifies him- or herself in the context of an in-finite experience of non-identity with the self. In his reading of Levinas in *Hospitalité II*, Derrida notes it by emphasising the *anarchic uncondition* of the "ethical or welcoming subject" in its irreplaceability in terms of "hostage": "Ipseity, in its passivity without the *archê* of identity, is hostage. The word *I* means *here I am*, answering for everything and everyone" (Lévinas 1988a, 145), – as "disappropriation" – (Derrida 2022, 179), as "de-substantiation" – (Lévinas 1988a, 163), as "one-for-the-other", as "hostage-substitution" or even as "psychosis" – "Uniqueness, out of concept, psyche as a grain of madness" (Lévinas 1988a, 282)…: "The arrivant", says Derrida in "Fidélité à plus d'un" (1998), "must be so surprising to me that I cannot even determine him as man/human. [...] *Hospitality opened to the newcomer without condition should open me to the newcomer, whoever he may be, but also to what we so easily call an animal or a god*. Good or evil, life or death." (Derrida 1998, 247)

And, from the point of view of subjectivity, with the problem of hospitality, it is therefore the deconstruction of the egological or autonomic, anthropological, ontological, if not even ontotheological, register of sovereignty (of the one who gives hospitality as a master or as a lord) that is at stake and radically called into question: there is no *chez soi /chez-soi* ["at home"] that is not always already "at home in other's home" [*chez soi chez l'autre*]: "The guest becomes the host of the host" – "L'hôte (*guest*) devient l'hôte (*host*) de l'hôte (*host*)", says Derrida in *De l'hospitalité* (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 1997, 111). "I is another" ["*Je est un autre*"], says Levinas, quoting Rimbaud and implicitly criticising the subject as defined in terms of consciousness, intentionality, *inter-esse*, freedom, will, power of decision, (autonomic) responsibility, uni-identity and presence-to-himself. A subject, an autonomic subject,

which Derrida says is nothing at all but a fable![15] Indeed, because of his finitude/creaturiality and his condition as "latecomer", he only comes to himself through the other, the primacy of the other, the primacy of the language of *the* other to whom he has to respond – as *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* puts it (see Derrida 1996b, 71) – and therefore in the scene of a *self-hetero-nomic experience* as a prosthetic being (*ab ovo*) – his appropriation (of himself or of the language *of the* other, of culture, etc.) is nothing but an *ex-appropriation*. A *grieving appropriation*.

Implicitly, this presupposes as much a critique of Kant's *universal hospitality* – in which the host welcomes as master and lord of the place where he "gives" place – as of Levinas's *hospitality of visitation*, confined as it is to the *human other* or to the *universal brother*: in fact, in Levinas, the other is always the *other man* – the other as human and the human as man [that is, in a scene of *anthropocentrism* and of *phallocentrism,* even if, as Derrida demonstrates in "Le mot d'accueil" – (see Derrida 1997d, 71–85) (and he was the only one to have done so!), there is also in Levinas an important *feminist hyperbole*] (see Bernardo 2023; Derrida 1997d, 83–85; 2018).

As Derrida says in the fifth session of *Hospitalité* (2022):

> Hospitality must, should, if there is any, open itself up to an other who is not mine, my host, my other, not even my neighbour or my brother (Levinas always says that the other, the other man, man as other is my neighbour, my universal brother, in humanity, and this is basically one of our great questions: should hospitality be reserved, confined to man, to the universal brother? Because even if Levinas disassociates the idea of fraternity from the idea of "similar" and the idea of neighbour or of proximity from the idea of non-distance, non-remoteness, fusion or identity, he maintains that the hospitality of the host as well as that of the hostage must belong to the place of neighbourly fraternity); *hospitality, then, must, should, if there is any, be open to another who is not mine, my host, my other, not even my neighbour or my brother, perhaps an animal* (Derrida 2022, 149).

I underline – "*hospitality, then, must, should, if there is any, be open to another who is not mine, my host, my other, not even my neighbour or my brother, perhaps an animal*": recalling that Derrida has "the question of the living and of the living animal" as "the great question", as "the most decisive question" (Derrida 2006, 57)[16] – it is in fact

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[15] "Le sujet est une fable", " 'Il faut bien manger' ou le calcul du sujet" in (Derrida, 1992b), 279. For the originally prosthetic register of subjectivity or identity, see also Derrida 1996a.

[16] And the most decisive question of all, because it involves everything: the question of subjectivity or humanity, the question of life, death, name, response and responsibility, the question of the world and life in the world, the question of ethics, politics, technology, science, art, etc.

the question of the human himself and of all his manifestations – I underline in order to point out once again not only the *meta*-ontological and the *meta*-juridico-political register of the *unconditionality* of *hospitality* according to Derrida, but also the *meta*-onto-anthropo-logical register of it, which questions and re-thinks the *sacrificial tradition* inherent to the *carno-phallo-logo-centrism* of the philosophical-cultural westernisation – *unconditional hospitality,* if there is any, and when there is, it must be the welcome of the other, of a "*tout autre*" who happens to be *anyone* [*n'importe qui*], *anyone at all* [*quiconque*], since, for Derrida, "*tout autre est tout autre*": "Every other is absolutely other" being the corner-stone very explicitly addressed by Derrida (see Derrida and Malabou 1999, 263) to the humanistic *ethics of holiness*[17] (but without hagiography) or of the *absolute otherness* of Emmanuel Levinas.

It is, let us also note it in passing, the *anthropocentrism* of traditional humanisms – including of the very demanding *meta*-ethical humanism of Emmanuel Lévinas (Lévinas 1988a, 164): *a humanism of the other man* (Derrida 1992b) – that is thus called into question: an *anthropocentrism* that since the biblical *Genesis* and the Aristotelian *zoon logon ekhon* has been the scene of the cratic sovereignty, or of the mastery, of man over man/woman, over nature and over animals. The cratic sovereignty which is truly at the origin of the violence of *carno-phallogocentrism* and its rough *sacrificialist spirit*:

> In any case, it is a question [for the *sacrificial* spirit or structure] of recognising a place left free, in the very structure of these discourses which are also "cultures", for a non-criminal killing: with ingestion, incorporation or introjection of the corpse. A real operation, but also a symbolic one when the corpse is "animal" (and who are we to believe that our cultures are carnivorous because animal proteins are irreplaceable?), a symbolic operation when the corpse is "human". (Derrida 1992b, 292–293)

It is a spirit that Derrida urges us to re-think and to fight in a tenacious pursuit of a *war for mercy*[18], for *compassionate responsibility* towards life in general (and not only towards human life) for *the promise* of an *absolutely other* world of Enlightenment to come (see Derrida 2003b, 163).

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[17] For this question, "De l'utilité des insomnies" (Levinas 1994, 201).

[18] "It is a war "between, on the one hand, those who violate not only animal life but even this feeling of compassion and, on the other hand, those who appeal to the irrefutable testimony of this pity. It is a war about pity" (Derrida 2006, 50).

Coda – re-thinking everything *tout autrement*

"[…] il faut faire l'impossible…"
(Derrida in Seffahi 1999, 141)

"Ce qui m'a tout le temps préoccupé, c'est l'hétérogène"
(Derrida and Ferraris 2018, 42)

As in an echo of Emmanuel Levinas's "extravagant hypothesis" (see Abensour 1998, 55–84), (although re-thought) concerning the origin of the State and its institutions – according to which, under the excellence of the "emphasis of exteriority" (see Lévinas 1988a, 231), i.e., of absolute otherness, society, law, the State and its institutions would derive from the "human intrigue" of (*meta-* or hyper-ethical) responsibility *for the other*[19] which is the very scene of *unconditional hospitality* – Jacques Derrida will make of the *unconditional hospitality* to the untimeliness of the event or to the absolute singularity of the other (whoever he, she or it may be) a kind of "trans-political" and "trans-juridical" principle for *re*-thinking in new terms thought and the human self, citizenship, law, civil disobedience, human rights, politics, democracy and its institutions: in all truth, to *re*-think them anew and *tout autrement*. As the philosopher confesses to Michel Wieviorka in "Le siècle et le pardon" (1999), this welcoming attention, this careful attention, this *unconditional* hospitality engages a deconstructive critique of everything that binds the social, politics and justice to the sovereignist phantasm and implants a kind of new "foundation" for the social, the citizenship, the law, the politics and the democracy in the guise of a "democracy to come" – "I would turn this trans-political principle [that of the experience (in the patic sense) of absolute singularity] into a political principle, a rule or a political stance: in politics, we must also respect secrecy, what exceeds politics or what no longer becomes from de juridical. This is what I would call the 'democracy to come'" (Derrida 2000, 129). In fact, a kind of new "foundation" for *re*-thinking *everything* anew and differently [*tout autrement*] – a "foundation" which, nevertheless, as Derrida observes in *Foi et Savoir* (2000), only provides a foundation by collapsing (see Derrida 2000, 32), by falling to pieces. An idea that Derrida reiterates, still in

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[19] "It is therefore not unimportant to know whether the egalitarian and just State in which man fulfils himself (and which it is a question of instituting and, above all, of maintaining) proceeds from a war of all against all or from the irreducible responsibility of one for all, and whether it can do without friendships and faces. It is not unimportant to know this in order war is not to be established as a war with a clear conscience." (Lévinas 1988a, 203).

dialogue with Wieviorka, but this time in "Accueil, Éthique, Droit et Politique" (1999) – an idea that I would like to reiterate here, in conclusion, emphasising once again the social, the political and the juridical implications of the "*pas au-delà*" that feeds Deconstruction and that draws the *hyperbolicity* of its *meta-onto-phenomenological philosophical idiom.* As Derrida argues:

> The question today is to know if hospitality comes from the politics and therefore from the State. "Civil disobedience" raises the question of knowing whether I have the right to act as an individual other than as a citizen: to invite anyone I want into my home, even if the law forbids it. When Kant says that hospitality must be universal, but on such and such a condition, he is talking about the hospitality of the citizen.
>
> But shouldn't hospitality, in the radical production of otherness, go beyond legislation, as a challenge to the State? This is not anarchy, in the romantic sense of the late nineteenth century, but a concept of politics that would establish solidarities and alliances beyond this or that particular nation-State. From this perspective, we could institute an international policy that would no longer be a policy in the traditional sense, i.e., subject to the authority of the State.
>
> The idea of democracy (as opposed to the concept of republic) brings a kind of challenge to the Republic and to the traditional politics, something that is difficult to reconcile with political duties.
>
> When I call for French law to be changed in order that hospitality is more in line with what it should be, it is the responsible citizen, asserting his desire of responsibility, who is expressing himself, and on the other side there is someone who is more than a citizen, endowed with a freedom to act, to speak or to receive whoever he wants in his home, whatever are the laws of the country of which I am a citizen. And, in doing so, *I claim to be calling for another politics, for a different definition of the political.* (Seffahi 1999, 145–146. My emphasis).

By dissociating the excess or the hyperbolicity of *unconditionality* from *sovereignty* – the hallmark *par excellence* of Deconstruction as a *meta-onto-phenomenological philosophical idiom*[20] – and by re-thinking sovereignty *from* and *in the name of just or messianic*

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[20] "Deconstruction begins here. It requires a difficult, almost impossible but indispensable dissociation between unconditionality (justice without power) and sovereignty (right, power or might). Deconstruction is of the side of unconditionality, even there where it seems impossible, and not of the side of sovereignty, even there where it seems possible." (Derrida and Roudinesco 2001, 153).

unconditionality[21] – Derridean Deconstruction is thus a *meta-onto-logical philosophical idiom* which is, in itself, a gift that calls for vigilance and reminds us of the urgent responsibility to *re-think everything* anew and quite differently [*tout autrement*] in the hope and the *promise* of a different [*tout autre*] "living together" (see Derrida 2014b, 25) in the world – for a "*good* living together" (Ibid) *in peace* in this world. Linked to the thought and the work of Jacques Derrida, here we find once again that this *philosophical idiom of thought* is manifestly the bearer of lights for the extreme urgency of a new "world" of Enlightenment to come.

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[21] "It's not just a question of dissociating the drive for sovereignty and the demand for unconditionality as two symmetrically associated terms, but of questioning, criticising, deconstructing, if you like, one in the name of the other, sovereignty in the name of unconditionality" (Derrida 2003b, 197).

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Hospitality (and the) Inhuman[1]

Giustino De Michele[2]

Abstract

During the second year of his *Hospitality* seminar, Jacques Derrida dedicates a prominent place to the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Also due to the unusual modalities of this seminar – and, as the editors of the published volume underline, having improvised a considerable part of the sessions, whereas he would usually write down a text that he read throughout – Derrida shows peculiarly adherent to Levinas's thought. Deploying an extensive reading of the latter's texts, the seminar shows a proximity that the published essays do not allow perceiving. This article wishes to interrogate this proximity, focusing on the motive of the inhuman (hospitality for the inhuman, and/or the inhumanity of hospitality), both in a critical and in a constructive fashion, and to address some current issues as pertains hospitality (and the) inhuman in the current Italian normative context.

Keywords

Hospitality, Deconstruction, Femininity, Animality, Migration, Derrida, Levinas

The recent publication of Jacques Derrida's seminars on hospitality (1995–1997) is susceptible to reviving the debate on the ethical implications of the thought of deconstruction. The second year of this seminar took place after the death of Derrida's friend Emmanuel Levinas, and, in part, before an important Parisian symposium in homage to the Lithuanian philosopher. On the occasion of this symposium, Derrida delivered a conference that was elaborated during the first sessions of his 1996-1997 seminar and was subsequently published in the volume *Adieu, to Emmanuel Levinas*. Derrida's reflection on hospitality was therefore, for him, also an occasion to return to

Levinas's philosophy, especially since hospitality is one of its major concepts – one capable of defining ethics itself, and ethics as a way of being in the world; as being the host, or the hostage, of "the other".

One thing that Derrida considers as a potential revolution, and a most original gesture in the context of the Western tradition, is Levinas's criticism of autonomy as the founding assumption of ethics. Levinas's concern for the other, and for welcoming the other – a necessity which is metaphysical, i.e. at the same time a given and a prescription – induces a radical questioning of the conception of responsibility, and *a fortiori* of political intervention. This heteronomous perspective, and the radical division (if not the abyss) that for Levinas separates the absoluteness of the other and the necessary conditional realisation of justice, seem nevertheless to entail its inapplicability. This is what compelled Derrida – in spite of the criticisms affirming the sterile ideality of his thought – to articulate a Levinassian and a Kantian perspective, in order to show the necessity that an ethics precipitate, as if physio-chemically, into political measures, and even thanks to some possibility of enforcement. Such attitude is particularly evident in his *Hospitality* seminars, where Derrida tackles in detail the socio-political and jurisdictional actuality of the mid-nineties, while he was also personally engaged in the French context.

The affirmation of the necessity of an application of ethics – albeit singular, without an assured rule of schema, and always contingent – is not the only originality of Derrida's position vis-à-vis Levinas's: whereas the latter's perspective is heteronomous, the former's is also non-anthropocentric. This entails a criticism of Levinas's humanism (as well as virilism), a generalisation of his approach and of the otherness that it is concerned with, but also another rather audacious articulation: the placing of the Levinassian perspective alongside those of Freud and Nietzsche, two fundamental references for Derrida's thought of a structure of experience that shall encompass "the living in general" as he would put it. This is a move that allows a deconstructive perspective to tackle bioethical issues (cloning, for example) as well as "biopolitical" ones.

In the following pages, I will first aim to retrieve some of the main features of Derrida's philosophical operations starting from Levinas's thought and concerning the motif of hospitality, and in conclusion show how the resulting position can be *applied* to address some punctual and contemporary normative shifts that concern migration. If this approach proves pertinent, then this attempt may prove to be a useful preliminary step toward a *deconstructive* consideration of contemporary politics and geopolitics, in a context where migration is at the same time an issue capable of

unhinging the principles of internal and international politics and state-of-law, and one susceptible of doing so at the very threshold of nature and culture, because of the dehumanisation that migrating people are subjected to, but also because of the more and more frequent climatic motivation to migrate.

During the second year of his *Hospitality* seminar, Jacques Derrida devotes a very prominent place to discussing the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and his conception of hospitality. As the editors of the volume (Derrida 2022)[3] point out, this seminar was taught in quite an unusual way: normally, Derrida would carefully type, and then read and enact his script in front of his public. In this case, he improvised many of the sessions (the texts of which have been reconstructed from the audio recordings), and in particular he deployed very extensive readings of the texts he tackled, notably those of Levinas.

Also because of this circumstance, in this seminar Derrida appears to adhere peculiarly closely to Levinas's thought, to the latter's conception of hospitality and of the articulation of responsibility and liberty, and shows great interest in his conception of a passive, intermittent constitution of ipseity. This is peculiar if one thinks of Derrida's early essay "Violence and Metaphysics", which is strongly critical of Levinas's attempt to conceive of an ethics and an ontology beyond violence while making recourse, as the former suggests, to a quasi negative-theological stance. In the later essay "At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am", Derrida is critical with regard to sexual difference, as he is in *Adieu, to Emmanuel Levinas*, a text which takes on the first sessions of the *Hospitality II* seminar, and which, while presenting a generous reading, does not let the reader perceive the same proximity to Levinas's thought that the later sessions of the seminar seem to show.

And yet, one may recall the clear assumption by which, in *Of Grammatology* as well as in the earlier seminar *Heidegger: the Question of Being and History*, Derrida exposed the genealogy of the notion of the trace. On the very same page, the notion of the trace is related to Freud, to Nietzsche, and to Levinas. The occurrence of this last proper name is a hapax in *Of Grammatology* (Derrida 1997a, 70), as it was in the earlier seminar (Derrida 2016, 151-52), but this may even add to the strength of its evocation. Nonetheless one may still find it difficult to perceive the pertinence or the reason for the articulation of this trio: Nietzsche and Freud, willy-nilly, go rather easily hand in hand under Derrida's pen, particularly if one tries to seize the latter's conception of the structure of experience as dependant on the notion of animality (as I have aimed to do in De Michele 2021); but precisely in *The Animal*

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[3] All translations from this seminar which appear in this article are my own.

That Therefore I Am, or in "Eating Well", Derrida is strongly critical as concerns Levinas's humanism and violent denial of the animal other. On the other hand, when Derrida correlates psychoanalysis and Nietzschean empiricism to a radicalisation of the phenomenological reduction, or to the question of an impossible responsibility that a passive, vulnerable and non-autonomous subjectivity must endure before recurring to or longing for liberty, one perceives the reasons for articulating the said trio.

This contextualisation might allow one to read in a more faceted way a quotation such as the following, stemming from the *Perjury and Pardon I* seminar, which is the very direct prolongation of the second part of the *Hospitality II* seminar:

> an event, every event is traumatic. And traumatism […] is that which makes precarious [the] distinction between the point of view of the subject and what is produced independently of desire. (Derrida 2019, 407)
>
> It is that which, within desire, constitutes it as possible and insists there while resisting it, as the impossible: some outside, irreducibly, as some nondesire, some death, and something inorganic. […] Inappropriability of the other. (Derrida 2002, 156)[4]

And so, when going back to "To Speculate – on 'Freud'", one reads that "the pleasure principle […] *unleashes* in itself the *absolute* other" (Derrida 1987, 283), one can already perceive our articulation. But – at least for the author of this article – this becomes perceptible precisely after reading the transcriptions of the *Hospitality II* sessions.

The following paragraphs will thus develop some impressions that stem from the copula of Levinas with "Freud and Nietzsche", which is to say, of a thought of hospitality with an affirmation of the animal, or of the inhuman. Hospitality for the inhuman and the inhumanity of hospitality will be our theme. In the framework set by Derrida's reading of Levinas, this development can mean two things: criticising Levinas's humanism; or, on the contrary, stressing those aspects of Levinas's subjectivity that can define a *non-human* structure of experience. So my first step, in interrogating this Derridian proximity to Levinas, will be critical; the second will rather be constructive; then, in a third step, I will try to consider the issue of hospitality (and of inhumanity) in the context of current Italian legislation.

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[4] "Typewriter Ribbon" (Derrida 2002) re-elaborates the last part of the 1997-1998 seminar (Derrida 2019). The second quoted passage, absent from the seminar, directly follows the re-elaboration of the one that precedes it in my quotation. The translation of Derrida 2019 is mine, following Peggy Kamuf's one in Derrida 2022.

1.

My criticism of Derrida will concern his not having been critical enough. Whereas a few months later, in Cerisy, speaking of animality, he will be merciless in his reading of Levinas's "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights" (in Levinas 1990), in our seminar the issue of the animal or of the in-human does not seem so crucial to him. In fact, here Derrida rather concentrates on the figure of the feminine (or of the un-virile), and gives a rather generous reading of the treatment of femininity in *Totality and Infinity*. This gracious or at least suspended account is justified by the fact that Derrida considers Levinas's femininity as a figure of hospitality, and of hospitality as an original structure of the I (*Moi*), and more than this, as the condition of possibility of the welcoming (*accueil*) of the other. In order to host or to receive the Other, according to Levinas, the I must in the first place affirm itself – not as a case of a generality (as one substance among others) but as a separated and solitary instance. This solitude is not uniqueness, but separation; and separation undoes uniqueness: the I is not a particle of a single, monistic Spirit or substance. It is rather an independent living instance (*psychisme*) in a plural world: a *creature*, separated from its creator, as well as from other creatures, and from the rest of creation.

So the I needs a dwelling. Hence a woman. The figure of the home stands on intermediate ground: between the I as facing the world of material need and enjoyment (here the Other assumes the form of material otherness), and the I as facing the social and moral world, where the *choc* of the *visage* arrives (the *visage* being the expression, as language, of human otherness as humanity itself). Between these two situations stands the figure of the home: the home is the stance that the I establishes, and from which it can exert work on material otherness, but also welcome the arrival of the human other. But, most importantly, the home is not an autistic space: if it opens on the Other (the *visage* of a virile and *speaking* otherness), it is also opened by the Other: (the *bosom* of feminine and *silent* otherness).

One cannot speculate enough on the opposition between the soft, speechless, and shy feminine otherness, and the "*droiture*", the "*percement*", the "*enseignement*", the *erection*, in a word the *rigor* of the visage which is the expression of virile otherness. Derrida does recognise this regressive opposition, and nevertheless also underlines that

> there would be nor welcoming nor hospitality without [the] radical alterity which supposes itself separation. The recollection [*recueillement*], the being-together itself supposes infinite separation [because] the by-oneself [*chez-soi*] of the home [is] not a nature or a root, but the response to an errantry (Derrida 2022, 71-2).

The welcoming supposes the recollection which supposes the welcoming [and/ of otherness]. And this co-implication defies chronology as much as logic. (Derrida 2022, 79)

In this way, Derrida can overprint two interpretations: one clearly androcentric, one potentially feminist. And this original structure would not be inscribed in a teleology, but rather frozen in the oscillation of the undecidable. I think Derrida is wrong here: in Levinas (in *Totality and Infinity*) there is a chronology and a logic, that is, there is a teleology, and even an archeo-teleology, even though the *arché* in question is not a being, or Being, nor even an origin, but otherness itself, or better still, separation. This is precisely what is implied by these passages:

"The chosen home is the very opposite of a root. It indicates a disengagement, a wandering [*errance*] which has made it possible" (Levinas 1979, 172). Or: "Recollection refers to a welcome." (Levinas 1979, 155)

This reference is the indication of a provenance and of a destination. It is an *orientation*. And it depends on the expression of the other in three *virile* senses: the act of (godly) creation; the act of masterful teaching of a master (should it spring from the face of "the widow and the orphan" – who are always mentioned after "the poor and the Stranger"); and the act of fecundity, which produces the other through the I itself (that is, paternity, which is a relation from father to son that explicitly echoes creation, but among creatures). The expression, then, of God, the master, and the father.

Derrida rightly says that pure hospitality, for Levinas, is alien from anticipation, from the modality of the "not yet" (*pas encore*) (Derrida 2022, 147). But this is not true for "feminine hospitality". Not only is this figure inscribed in a chronology and a logic, not only *is* it a figure, and not only is there a teleology in Levinas, but there is a whole system. And, moreover, what reveals the systematic aspect of his thought of alterity and the place it gives to femininity is the figure of animality (or its loose synonym inhumanity). The opposition human/inhuman *assembles*, so to speak, the metaphysics of separation.

Among many relevant passages, the following one, which Derrida quotes as well, is indicative:

The simple living from [*vivre de*]… the spontaneous agreeableness of the elements is not yet [*pas encore*] habitation. But habitation is not yet the transcendence of language. The Other who welcomes in intimacy is not the *you* [*vous*] of the face

that reveals itself in a dimension of height, but precisely the *thou* [*tu*] of familiarity: a language without teaching, a silent language, an understanding without words, an expression in secret. (Levinas 1979, 155; quoted in Derrida 2022, 81)

An oriented frame, a whole *Bildungsroman* is presupposed here, in which the animal, the infant, the feminine, the virile (the inauthentic *and* the authentic) are arranged. In order to fully read this quote one should deploy all the metaphysics that underpins the anthropology of *Totality and Infinity*. We shall limit ourselves to a very schematic narrative sketch.

1) The starting point of this *Bildungsroman* is separation: the fact of the plurality of the creature. 2) Then we have the position of the I in egoism, through the act of enjoyment (*jouissance*). 3) We then encounter a trouble of enjoyment, which is the enjoyment of some alterity; this trouble emerges against the elemental indistinction of what enjoyment enjoys. Here we have the first "taking off" from animal dependence ("The possibility of rising [*décoller*] from the animal condition is assuredly thus described." (Levinas 1979, 149) 4) Thus we lift to a second level: the I builds a home, whose condition of possibility is nevertheless feminine otherness. 5) The home has windows and doors, it is open to the exterior, and this relation to otherness (to social, and virile otherness) gives origin to work, to the production of works (*oeuvres*).[5] 6) Again, we here encounter some trouble: "Despite the infinite extension of needs it makes possible, economic existence remains within the same [*demeure dans le Même*] (just like animal existence). Its movement is centripetal." (Levinas 1979, 175) The I is stuck in an economic, socio-political, and even geo-political level of the elemental: money, exchange and alienation, including the institutional alienation in the form of the anonymous subjection to an objective spirit, to the State. 7) On this third level, the I must properly receive the teaching of the visage of the Other, and learn the necessity, in turn, to express (and not only to act or work) itself authentically, in a responsible, rather than free, fashion. 8) Here we meet femininity again: the proper expression of separation passes through *eros*, and must once more endure some trouble, i.e., the possibility of the elemental animalisation of voluptuousness. 9) Finally, all obstacles and troubles surpassed, we reach filiation: the relation of a finite father to a finite son (Levinas names it "fecundity"), which means the return to the congenital separation from which we started.

Animality is the key negative figure of this picture. Imprisoned in the circuit of behaviour, Levinas's animal, much like Heidegger's, cannot really enjoy, or even

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[5] But still: "Action does not express. […] Works signify their authors, but indirectly, in the third person" (Levinas 1979, 66-7).

have a body. Most of all, it cannot be troubled. Animality is here autism as the figure of the negative. It is blind appropriation; monotonous exercise of sameness; mere enjoyment, mere reproduction and representation, mere voluptuousness, without respect for the other. Need, without desire (whereas for Levinas desire is the relation to infinity, or: separation *is* desire). Better still: *allergy*.

But – and therefore – all the effort of his book, says Levinas, is precisely to affirm the human against or beyond the inhuman and the animal. That is, to affirm a "non-allergic relation with alterity" (Levinas 1979, 47). This distinction, with all its biological, biopolitical, and political-biologistic nuances and presuppositions, will last, in Levinas, at least since *In the Time of the Nations*, quoted by Derrida, who in the seminar remarks this "terrible alternative of the inhuman or of the human" (Derrida 2022, 44)[6] in Levinas's text.

2.

Animality is allergy: this definition allows me to move to my second point, a constructive one. Derrida opens the fourth session of *Hospitality II* by announcing that he will speak of the relationship between hospitality and evil, or more exactly of a "*mal d'hospitalité*", where *mal* means at the same time sickness and lack, but also the evil or the bad as regards hospitality. And he says that he will articulate this "*mal d'hospitalité, la maladie, la blessure, la mort*" with two Levinassian motifs that he is thus going to introduce: vulnerability and visitation (see Derrida 2022, 113–14). Thus, Derrida underscores the distinction between hospitality as invitation (I invite someone or something, that I thus expect) and hospitality as visitation (someone or something arrives beyond every premonition and beyond every possible pre-immunisation). This second hospitality, beyond all horizontality and all teleology, beyond all horizons of expectation, is hospitality itself: exposure to the infinity of otherness. But "the breaking-in" [*effraction*] of this hospitality is "traumatising": it is "the ruin of hospitality within hospitality, the ruin of the *chez-soi*" (Derrida 2022, 119). *Hospitality is pathological*.

If such hospitality defines metaphysics as well as the basic structure of the psychic, then this pathology is precisely what, in Levinas's view, overturns a Kantian perspective according to which autonomy is the condition of possibility (*ratio essendi*) of duty and responsibility (which is in turn its *ratio cognoscendi*). If the subject is

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[6] Derrida (2022, 43) quotes "The Nations and the Presence of Israel" (in Levinas 1994, 97).

heteronomous, if it is a host, or a hostage, then this pathology is the condition of responsibility which is in turn the condition of any autonomy.

We mentioned before the "choc" that makes the human "take off from animality". Derrida remarks that, speaking of "the violent wounding that makes of the subject a subject" (Derrida 2022, 121), already in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas mobilises a psychiatric vocabulary, which will become more explicit in *Otherwise than Being*. In particular, Derrida stresses the word "allergy". For Levinas, says he, "allergy is an allergy to traumatism, to psychosis, to persecution" (Derrida 2022, 122). In other words, it is an allergy to reason intended as the vulnerable welcoming of the wholly other. The allergic refusal of the other "signals [the] natural animality, [the] *conatus essendi* of the biological being which tends to persevere into its own being" (*ibidem*). But, as we said, only the human, as opposed to the animal, is open to being "lovesick […], or hospitality-sick, or mortal, or traumatisable, or subjected to psychosis, or responsible, or host, or hostage" (Derrida 2022, 123). *Allergy is* human *inhumanity.*

Here, while developing these remarks, Derrida suddenly appeals to Kafka (in particular to *Der Bau* and *Fürsprecher*) in order to ask: "What is dwelling?" (*Qu'est-ce qu'habiter?*), saying that asking this question means asking the question of the animal, and then he suggests that "it is difficult to say that human dwelling is totally heterogeneous to animality, to the protection of a biological organism seeking survival in the midst of a menacing milieu" (Derrida 2022, 124). Then, more affirmatively: "One will always be able to describe the human dwelling as the protection of an animal." (Derrida 2022, 124)

Derrida is saying that hospitality is not an exclusive feature of man, or even "the proper of man", because it is *not* a-inhuman. And so when, following Kafka, he characterises the obsessed and persecuted subject, the narrating I, the *Ich* or the *Je* of his writings, he describes "the *persecuted I* of the *I am followed* (the *I am* of the *cogito sum* is in the first place an *I am/follow followed* [je suis suivi], I live as an I am myself that is followed): "le *je persecuté* du *je suis suivi* (le *je suis* du *cogito sum* est d'abord un *je suis suivi*, je vis comme un je suis moi qui suis suivi)" (Derrida 2022, 132). We recognise here the formulations of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (Derrida 2008, 64, 69, 113, 128, and *passim*).

But Derrida even makes a step further: not only does he say that hospitality must not turn its face away from animality; not only does he say that it is not alien to animality (and thus that an animal psychism, according to him, can be a host and a hostage). He also proposes to recognise, in Levinas's perspective, in the

vulnerability, the radical passivity, and in the radical compassion of his metaphysics, the structure of animality itself. This is how a thought of the trace can join together Freud's, Nietzsche's, and Levinas's legacy as concerns the problem of the living.

Thus, while reading the preface of *Otherwise than Being* Derrida comments: "the 'pathological', this means that I act not as a free and rational subject, but as a subject which is subjected to its passions, to its interests, to its empiric motives" (Derrida 2022, 262); this is the definition of animality for Aristotle, and of perspectivism according to Nietzsche. This heteronomy, this "passivity that we find in hospitality as facing visitation", says Derrida, is "psychosis before psychology, if you want, it is traumatism before psychoanalysis." (Derrida 2022, 263) "The relation to the other, it is psychosis." (Derrida 2022, 277) And: "I am [*je suis*], *cogito sum*, as I am [*en tant que*] traumatised" (Derrida 2022, 275). Until (it is the very last page of the published seminar), Derrida risks what follows: a passive, vulnerable, persecuted self,

> this ipseity, is the condition of possibility of ethical substitution as compassion, sacrifice, expiation, etc. This is the question then, once again: what is a self [*soi*], an ipseity? If auto-affection, auto-movement, the fact of being able to move, of being moved and affected by oneself is its condition and to be true its definition, [then] it is the proper of what one calls the living in general, and not only of man but also of the animal, of the compassion with the animal. (Derrida 2022, 354)

Here Derrida appeals to Levinas to think of animality *as non-allergy*. Again, what Derrida deploys in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* concerning compassion is anticipated here, but through a direct recourse to Levinas (see Derrida 2008, notably 27–9). We see what a thought of autoimmunity can owe to a dehumanised thought of allergy. And looking at what Derrida says in *For What Tomorrow*, taking up the issue of human cloning, about the articulation of determinism and freedom,[7] we could even sketch out a Freudo-Levinassian model of the psychic. In this model, a plurality of psychic mechanisms would allow for something (the other or the event) to arrive: the plurality of mechanisms frees ipseity from the machine of a living that goes on reproducing itself, and thus impedes the arrival of anything new. At the same time, a plural machine would make heteronomy a condition of responsibility and of autonomy. This model even fits with Levinas's notion of an intermittent constitution of ipseity: where the I is, every time, the result of an absolute substitution of self to self, beyond every continuity or perseveration into being (I *am* the other of the other that I *is*).

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[7] Cf. the chapters "Disordered Families" and "Unforeseeable Freedom," in Derrida and Roudinesco (2004).

3.

But to conclude these impressions I would rather like to take a third step: what about hospitality and inhumanity in a more concrete way? The recent Italian legislation regarding migration seems to offer an accurate confirmation of the pertinence of a deconstructive thought of conditional hospitality, and of hospitality *and* the inhuman.

I will consider two declinations of this copula: 1) hospitality *for* the inhuman, intended not as the animal, but as a less-human-than-us human. In the case of the Italian legislation, which concentrates on migration through the Mediterranean (by Middle Eastern, North African, and Sub-Saharan people) the criterion for this distinction is ethnic, or somatic – if not chromatic. 2) And the inhumanity of hospitality itself.

In the *Hospitality II* seminar, speaking of subjectivity as hospitality, of hospitality as responsibility, and of responsibility as substitution of the I for the other's death, Derrida defines a universal culpability consisting in the fact of being there (and very much recalling Anaximander's saying).

> This [is the] culpability of the survivor, […] of all survivor, of whoever is in mourning, of all work of mourning – and the work of mourning is always the experience of an 'I survive', therefore of the living in general (Derrida 2022, 188).

It is then from this structure of "all living as a survivor", that is, from this *animal* experience, that hospitality must be negotiated. As we know, for Derrida pure hospitality, which is itself potentially the worse (it is unconditional, and lawless), cannot exist as such: all hospitality is impure and conditional. It necessarily undergoes negotiation. Let us point out two of the quasi-transcendental conditions of this negotiation.

1) The first is sensitive: I am keener and more likely to hold myself responsible for those who are next to me (in whatever sense). And at the same time, I cannot but be concerned by a limited number of items: I am finite, and thus subject to topologic or spatio-temporal preference. In *The Gift of Death* Derrida says this *a propos* of his cat as compared to all others (and to all other occasions of concern) (cf. Derrida 1995, 71). 2) In our seminar, Derrida reiterates the remark on preference, relating it to the question of the "third" in Levinas. For Levinas, "The third is other than the neighbor" (Levinas 1991, 157; quoted in Derrida 2022, 84-5). And the necessity to decide between assisting the other or a third introduces the violence of comparison,

negotiation, and conditionality, in hospitality. Thus the third perverts justice and configures another inhuman elementality: the tyranny of calculation, of economy, of money; and it configures another impersonal regime of preference.

Proximity and calculation, extension and money, neutralise the purity of hospitality.

Strikingly, the current Italian laws on migration confirm this diagnosis, while reversing in a paradoxical way Derrida's or Levinas's concern. The concern, the aim of this conditional and public hospitality is to *not* tend toward unconditional hospitality. The tragedy is *not* having to choose among the other and the third. The problem is rather: how to let in as few "thirds" as possible? How to neutralise hospitality? This is the question. And, if a thorough neutralisation is impossible (complete closure, allergy or in-hospitality are legally and factually impossible, since a decree of complete closure would be illegal vis-à-vis international law, and since there is migration), how to deny hospitality? And can one call this (consequently conditional) neutralisation (as we saw, at least for Derrida, such conditionality is necessary, and both for hospitality and inhospitality), inhuman? It is possible to point out two legislative measures that suggest a positive answer, both on the rhetorical and on the phenomenological plane.

The first legal expedient is topologic: it concerns extension, proximity and distance. Since early 2023, the Italian government has been preventing NGO ships from rescuing more than one endangered boat at a time (hence proximity) and subsequently obliging them to unload the rescued persons in a port designated by the authorities (hence distance: the designated port is normally quite remote from the rescuing area).[8] The rationale for this measure is, first, to impose economic and procedural obstacles on rescuing organisations, and, regarding (potentially) migrant people, to dissuade through exemplarity: vessels are prevented from saving as many people as they might, and it is hoped that this will dissuade other people from migrating. *Punish one, teach a hundred* might be its motto.

Thus, the state *de facto* compels NGOs that rescue migrants at sea to commit negligence in assisting endangered people. Rather than letting people die, or killing them, it acts in such a way as to make people die; one might wonder whether this prefigures the emergence of a new paradigm of governance, after or along with the disciplinary and the biopolitical (in Foucauldian terms). In early September 2023,

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[8] These procedures were defined by the Italian Decreto-Legge 2 gennaio 2023, n. 1, the so-called "Decreto Piantedosi", after the name of the Home Secretary of the government led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. This decree was converted into law with modifications as Legge 24 febbraio 2023, n. 15.

the Italian Coast Guard even commanded an NGO vessel, on an administrative pretext concerning its regulatory approval, to unload all rescue gear (from medicine to life jackets): this episode epitomises the banality and brutality of such logic.[9]

The second expedient is economic. Even more recent norms have instituted new measures for the "Permanence and Repatriation Centres":[10] among these, they establish the extension of a (barely legitimate)[11] detention period in these concentration centres, including for people seeking asylum and minors, while these wait for their applications to be processed; they establish the obligation for minors to, *de facto*, prove their age; and most egregiously of all, they establish that asylum seekers coming from countries labelled as "safe" must pay a 4938 Euro[12] deposit: this "financial guarantee must be granted in one lump sum by means of a bank guarantee or insurance surety policy, and it is individual and cannot be paid by third parties."[13]

This deposit, paid upon arrival, is meant to guarantee that migrant persons can cover the costs for living out of the detention centre, and for their eventual repatriation, and is cashed in if they become unreachable. In other words, after paying smugglers to cross the sea, one can pay the Italian state in order to smuggle oneself across the borders of Europe. *If you cannot teach a hundred by punishing one, then at least make them pay.*

But pay for what? This payment configures a hospitality whose condition is the commerce of oneself. But more precisely: one does not pay to stay alive; one does not pay not to die (at sea); rather, one pays for having remained alive. Almost comical in its sadism, this norm signifies a vindictive punishment for not having died, and for not being empirically and completely naked, miserable, and defenceless, just like a

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[9] The vessel is the Mediterranea's Mare Jonio (see Candito 2023).

[10] The main norm is the Decreto-Legge 10 marzo 2023, n. 20, the so-called "Decreto Cutro", after the name of the locality where on February 23, 2023 at least 94 people died in a shipwreck, some hundreds of metres away from the coast of Calabria, potentially due to a failure to rescue them by Italian Coast Guard following new ministerial intervention protocols: inquiries were completed on July 23, 2024, with a request for six indictments. Cf. "Naufragio di Cutro" (for the English version: "2023 Calabria migrant boat disaster") and Musolino (2024). The Decreto-Legge 2023 10 marzo 2023, n. 20, has been converted into law as Legge 5 Maggio 2023, n. 50, with minor modifications. Following norms are the Decreto-Legge 19 settembre 2023, n. 124, and the Decreto-Legge 5 ottobre 2023, n. 133, so-called "Cutro 2".

[11] If one considers (cf. Covelli 2023) the Decreto Legislativo 18 agosto 2015, n. 142, notably art. 6; this norm actuates two EU directives: 2013/32 and /33; paragraph 4 of the latter's directive's art. 8, "Detention", specifies what follows: "Member States shall ensure that the rules concerning alternatives to detention, such as regular reporting to the authorities, the deposit of a financial guarantee, or an obligation to stay at an assigned place, are laid down in national law." Nevertheless, the Judgment of the European Court of 14 May 2020, considering *inter alia* the application of the 2007 Hungarian Law on entry and residence by third-country nationals, counters the Italian Government's interpretation of the said directive.

[12] This amount is defined by the Decreto Ministeriale 14 settembre 2023 (art. 2), which specifies the Decrato Legislativo n. 142, 2015 (see the previous footnote).

[13] Decreto 14 settembre 2023, art. 3 (see the previous footnote).

Levinassian other is. "They paid smugglers; they even have shoes, mobile phones, their little necklace, their little watch: then at least make them pay" – thus spoke the Italian Deputy Prime Minister and former Home Secretary on one of the late Silvio Berlusconi's TV channels.[14]

Ironically, this confirms Derrida's definition of the universal structure of ipseity as substitution, and its animal or inhuman quality. Not only do all living beings have to negotiate the conditions of finite hospitality, but there is more to this: what "all living as a survivor" (as Derrida puts it) has to expiate, what is thus inexpiable, is survival itself. Survival is the impossible: it is inexpiable expiation.

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[14] See "Puntata del 24 settembre 2023", 15'00".

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Undecidability and the Reference of Formal Systems

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Abstract

This paper attempts to provide an account of the reference of formal systems. I assume (on grounds that I cannot lay out fully) that formal systems can be considered to be referential, that is, capable of formulating truths in the correspondence sense, on two conditions: 1. that they are consistent and 2. that they contain true but unprovable formulas. The first of these conditions is self-evident; the second, by contrast, cannot be assumed without begging the question, without presupposing truth before accounting for its possibility. I argue, however, that Kurt Gödel's proof of the inevitability of undecidable formulas in any formal system provides a ground for assuming the existence of true but unprovable sentences without presupposing objective truth. For this, however, we need to develop a different sense of 'true' from what is usually assigned to the undecidable formula. Using insights from Jacques Derrida, I argue that we can legitimately conceptualize the truth of the undecidable formula as referring not to some objective reality but to the formal system itself.

Keywords

Kurt Gödel, Jacques Derrida, undecidability, correspondence truth, reference

1. Introduction: Derrida and Gödel

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Derrida rarely speaks about formal logic or mathematics. Several French philosophers of his generation – such as Lacan, Deleuze or Kristeva – are apparently attracted to mathematical analogies, and Badiou bases his whole theory of the subject, of the event, and of truth procedures on formal logical considerations. In spite of his conspicuous silence about logic and mathematics, however, Derrida makes a remarkable reference to Gödel's undecidable sentences when introducing his own notion of undecidability (Derrida 1981b, 230). This, as Christopher Norris

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remarks, is a telling invocation of Gödel's incompleteness theorem, since it occurs at a cardinal point, "notably in [Derrida's] treatment of Mallarmé's paradoxical reflections on language, logic, reference and truth" (Norris 2012, 34), that is, at a point where Derrida is engaging with the most foundational issues of deconstruction. Derrida's allusion to Gödel might, therefore, indicate an analogy between the formal-logical, metamathematical Gödelian argument about undecidable formulas of arithmetic and the fundamental strategies of deconstruction. This analogy has been explored in some detail in literature that attempts to create a link between deconstruction and analytic philosophy, most notably by Graham Priest, Paul Livingston, and Christopher Norris (Priest 2002; Norris 2012; Livingston 2012).

Although Priest does not compare Derrida to Gödel specifically, his comments on deconstruction can no doubt make such a comparison possible. In his 1994 paper titled "Derrida and Self-Reference" he likens deconstruction's emphasis on the inexpressibility and unnameability of its central terms (such as *différance*) to the early Wittgenstein's thoughts on ineffability (Priest 1994), and in his 1995 book *The Limits of Thought* he presents the fundamental strategy of deconstruction – essentially on the basis of the same analysis – as an instance of what he terms the Inclosure Schema. The Inclosure Schema is a set of conditions that results in the production of a specific kind of contradiction wherein a term or a member of some totality is both inexpressible in terms of the theory organizing that totality (Transcendence) and is nevertheless expressed or conveyed by that theory (Closure). Priest discovers this schema and the resulting contradictions in the work of a great number of thinkers throughout the history of philosophy, including of course Gödel, whose undecidable formula he presents as an inclosure contradiction, since its undecidability both transcends the theory of provability in terms of which it is formulated and acquires its sole formulation in terms of this theory (Priest 2002, 144).[2] Similarly, he sees Derrida's central (non-)concepts, *différance*, trace, supplementarity, *pharmakon*, *parergon*, etc. as manifesting the same kind of contradiction. These (non-) concepts are inexpressible in terms of the context in which they emerge, since they transcend the founding opposition organizing that context, and yet, precisely by this inexpressibility, the context in which they appear still succeeds in conveying a sense of what is inexpressible. What is more, this inexpressible can only be revealed inside this context, albeit only as that which transcends it. It is by this means that the deconstructive procedures organized around these (non-)concepts satisfy the two

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[2] For Priest's in-depth discussion of Gödel's formula see his (Priest 2006, 39–50).

main conditions of Priest's Inclosure Schema: Transcendence and Closure (Priest 2002, 214–224).

Christopher Norris criticizes Priest's interpretation of Derrida for not taking into account how persistently the latter insists on consistency and on a classical bivalent logic (Norris 2006, 50; Norris 2012, 138; 148–149). However, he also recognizes and puts special emphasis on the analogy between deconstructive procedures and Gödel's incompleteness theorems. He points out that the aporetic outcome of "the various modes of deconstructive close-reading […] can best be understood by analogy with Gödel's incompleteness or undecidability theorem" (Norris 2012, 11), and insists that Derrida's invocation of Gödel's theorem "is not just a vaguely analogical or downright opportunist appeal to the presumed authority of mathematics and logic but a reference-point that precisely captures the movement – the logico-syntactic-semantic procedure – of Derrida's classic readings" (Norris 2012, 28). In spite of these general claims, however, Norris does not actually describe this analogy in detail. He makes a strong case for the relevance and applicability of formal logical considerations to deconstruction and vice versa, but the connection between Gödelian and Derridean undecidability remains merely implicit.

We are given a much more explicit treatment of this connection in Paul Livingston's book *The Politics of Logic*.[3] Similarly to Norris, Livingston starts out from the observation that "several of Derrida's key terms (for instance, *trace*, the 'undecidable,' and *différance*) and the textual *praxis* they embody can indeed usefully be understood as figuring the metalogical consequences of a thoroughgoing reflection on the implications of formalism" (Livingston 2012, 113). He then analyses Derrida's thoughts on mimesis (as expressed in his reading of Mallarmé in *The Double Session*) and on the term *différance* in close analogy with the status and function of Gödel's undecidable formula in the context of formal systems. He concludes that we can discover three fundamental similarities between Derrida's key terms and Gödel's undecidable formula:

> First, both depend on a kind of "self-referential" encoding whereby a system's total logic (the conditions for the possibility of its organizing distinctions) is formalized at a single point – the Gödel sentence or the "undecidable term" – which in turn makes it possible to inscribe an "undecidable." Second, both suggest a *generalization* of this result to show that any system of sufficient complexity will allow the inscription of undecidables […] [And third, both Gödel and Derrida's

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[3] Cf. also his paper "Derrida and Formal Logic: fomalizing the undecidable" (Livingston 2010), which is the original of the chapter in *The Politics of Logic*.

undecidable] always results from a semantical effect of *syntax* that cannot itself be excluded from any regular system of writing. (Livingston 2012, 121–122)

I will obviously not be able to represent the depth of Livingston's comparison here.[4] Suffice it to say that his detailed and carefully laid-out argument clearly establishes a deep connection between Gödel and Derrida's strategies. In this paper I will explain my own interpretation of this connection. I will present in outline an argument from a book that I am still working on; an argument in which I will attempt to show that Derrida's insightful treatment of undecidability can ground a new approach to the old problem of the reference of formal systems. This means that I will reverse the typical approach to the connection between Derrida and formal thought. Priest, Norris, and Livingston essentially use the analogy with formal logical considerations to provide a deeper understanding and justification of Derrida's arguments. Although both Norris and Livingston point out that analytic philosophy has much to learn from deconstruction, neither makes the case that deconstruction can have any bearing on formal logic. My starting point, on the other hand, is precisely this. I will argue that the development of formal logic has posed philosophical questions which can perhaps be handled in novel ways by implementing some of Derrida's insights.

In his seminal essay, "Différance" Derrida contends that "*différance* lends itself to a certain number of nonsynonymous substitutions, according to the necessity of the context" (Derrida 1981a, 12), and I will argue that Gödel's undecidable formula can be thought of as one such nonsynonymous substitution. The context in which this substitution occurs, moreover, is a particularly well-defined and lucid one: that of formal logical systems, which means that examining the status of Derridean undecidability in this precise context can also bring us closer to realizing Derrida's ambition expressed in his "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion": namely, to achieve "*the strictest possible determination* of the figures of play, of oscillation, of undecidability" (Derrida 1988, 145 (my italics)).

2. Formal Systems

Let us begin by familiarizing ourselves a little with the context: the precise and well-defined context of formal systems. For a system to be called a formal system it must first be capable of translating any statement it concerns itself with to a formula in the

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[4] For a more complete treatment see my (Barcsák 2017). The third of these similarities seems to me to be the most important one and I will rely on this in section 5 of this paper.

notation of the system; that is, to a string of symbols which is then manipulated by the system in a totally mechanical[5] way without regard to the meanings we originally attributed to the symbols. For in such a system, as Gödel puts it, "the meaning of the symbols is immaterial, and it is desirable that they be forgotten" (Gödel 1965, 153). This is precisely why such systems are called *formal*: the manipulations the strings of symbols undergo are governed by mechanical rules which affect the strings only on the basis of their form, totally disregarding their meanings. Typically, formal systems are built up by selecting a countable number of formulas, the axioms, and specifying the rules of manipulation in formal (or syntactic) terms.[6]

What counts as a formal system has been very clearly determined as a result of the 20th-century development of formal logic. It has been clarified, in particular, what we can consider to be an entirely mechanical system (that is, formal in the above sense).[7] It turns out that there is a class of formal systems which are mutually translatable into each other and hence equivalent, which represent everything that we can be certain is fully mechanically, formally representable. There are simpler formal systems that express less than this class of systems, but such simpler systems are fully represented in the latter; and there are more complex systems which express more than this class of systems, but which are not fully mechanical/formal. This class of systems, therefore, comprises everything that we now know is mechanically controllable.[8] In what follows, I will rely on one formalization of this kind of system, Douglas Hofstaedter's Typographical Number Theory (TNT) (Hofstadter 1979).

Such systems can express a great deal. TNT, for example, was designed to capture everything that we know about natural numbers and their relations. It can thus formalize any statement about natural numbers: statements such as 7+2=9, or

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[5] By "mechanical" I mean representable by a Turing-machine. In this sense, "mechanical" is synonymous with "effectively calculable" or with "reducible to a computable function of integers" (Gödel 1995, p. 304n1).

[6] David Hilbert, the initiator and main advocate of formalism in mathematics, describes formal systems as follows:

We now divest the logical signs of all meaning, just as we did the mathematical ones, and declare that the formulas of the logical calculus do not mean anything in themselves… In this way we now finally obtain, in place of the contentual mathematical science that is communicated by means of ordinary language, an inventory of formulas that are formed from mathematical and logical signs and follow each other according to definite rules. Certain of these formulas correspond to the mathematical axioms, and to contentual inference there correspond the rules according to which the formulas follow each other; hence contentual inference is replaced by manipulation of signs according to rules, and in this way the full transition from a naïve to a formal treatment is now accomplished. (Hilbert 1967, 381)

[7] A useful summary of the events that led to this realization – and in particular of the effects of Alan Turing's paper (Turing 1936) – is provided by Juliette Kennedy (Kennedy 2014, 114–119).

[8] It is important to emphasize that this is just what we *know* is mechanically controllable. We know that what can be captured in a Turing machine is mechanically controllable. On the other hand, the reverse claim – that is, that everything that is mechanically controllable is captured in a Turing-machine – cannot be proved. This is usually referred to as the Church-Turing thesis, and we know that – in addition to Alonso Church and Alan Turing – Gödel also believed that this thesis holds.

3×5≠10, which are true, but also false statements such as 2×2=6. These statements will look as follows in TNT notation:

SSSSSSSO+SSO=SSSSSSSSSO
SSSO·SSSSSO≠SSSSSSSSSSO
SSO·SSO=SSSSSSO

These are very simple statements, but TNT can express much more complex assertions about numbers, too: for example, it can formalize statements such as "there are infinitely many prime numbers," or "the expression $x^n+y^n=z^n$ has no integer solutions for n>2," or "every even number that can be expressed as the sum of two primes." The first of these is translated into TNT notation in this way: ∀d: ∃e: ~∃b: ∃c: (d + Se) = (SSb · SSc),[9] and for the other two a similar TNT translation is also possible. In fact, TNT is complex and expressive enough to formalize potentially any statement about natural numbers.

What is more, it can even produce a complete list of all the meaningful arithmetical statements by means of formalization. It can rule out in a completely mechanical way all meaningless statements, such as for example × 12 + −6 = 66. A statement like this obviously does not make sense because it is not well formed (it just does not use the symbols in the right way), and TNT can always determine by a mechanical procedure whether or not any statement expressed in its notation is well-formed. As a result, we can select only the well-formed formulas (wff) of the system. Moreover, we could even organize these into a list, for example, on the basis of the length of the formulas, starting with the shortest and moving towards increasingly longer ones. Among formulas of equal length, we could create order by some alphabetization, and in this way, in theory, we could compile the complete list of well-formed formulas. This list would of course be an infinite one, but it is countably infinite, which means that we can even number the formulas, assigning a unique natural number (of which there are likewise an infinite number) to each item on the list.

Another important property of formal systems is that not only are they capable of producing a complete list of all the well-formed formulas, but they can also enumerate all the *theorems* of the system; that is, all the formulas that can be derived from the axioms by the mechanical application of the rules of procedure. In other

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[9] Where b, c, e and d are integer variables, ∀ and ∃ are the usual universal and existential quantifiers ("for all" and "there exists", respectively), ~ is the negation operator, and S represents the successor function ("successor of").

words, formal systems are also capable of generating a complete list of the formulas that they can prove (that is, formally derive from the axioms).

What formal systems can provide is thus two lists: one containing all the possible well-formed formulas (that is, all the meaningful statements) about numbers, and the other comprising all the provable formulas. With the help of our formal system, therefore, we can potentially reduce the question of arithmetical truth to a mechanically controllable procedure. We take a random formula from the list of well-formed formulas – say "2×2=6" or "the expression $x^n+y^n=z^n$ has no integer solutions for n>2" – and ask, "Is this on the list of theorems?" If it is, then it is true, and if not, then it is false. To ascertain that an arbitrary well-formed formula is on the list of theorems we must demonstrate that the given formula can be gained by the mechanical manipulation (that is, a purely formal, syntactic handling) of the formulas representing the axioms. This is what is called a proof. Sometimes it is easy to prove whether a well-formed formula is on the list of theorems. In just a few steps, for example, we could prove that the formula representing "2×2=6" is not on the list; at other times the proof is rather more complicated. It took more than three and a half centuries to prove that Fermat's last theorem ("the expression $x^n+y^n=z^n$ has no integer solutions for n>2") is on the list, and the demonstration is more than 120 pages long (Andrew Wiles proved it in 1994–95) (Wiles 1995). We still do not know whether the statement "every even number can be expressed as the sum of two primes" is on the list – it probably is, because this is Goldbach's conjecture, which is in all likelihood true, but ever since the conjecture was first formulated in 1742, no one has succeeded in demonstrating it. In principle, however, we could expect that such a demonstration may eventually be carried out and that thus the truth of arithmetical propositions can always be determined entirely mechanically.

3. Reference and Truth

Once we establish this, however, the question arises: "In what sense could the theorems of a formal system like this be said to be 'true'?" What we mean by "true" is generally the so-called correspondence conception of truth; that is, the view under which – to use Alfred Tarski's phrase – "[t]he truth of a sentence consists in its agreement with (or correspondence to) reality" (Tarski 1944, 343) or, to use another formulation by the same author, "[a] sentence is true if it designates an existing state of affairs" (Tarski 1944, 343). But if the system producing the theorems is fully mechanical, then how can we know that the formulas mechanically produced

actually correspond to states of affairs in an objective reality? If the system is purely mechanical, then there is a chance that everything it produces is mere tautology and that all that its operations amount to is merely, as Gödel puts it, "an idle running of language" (Gödel 1995, 319).[10]

This is the question of the reference of formal systems – it is a vast topic in the philosophy of mathematics and I will not be able to go into the details here. Suffice it to say that in my book I come to the conclusion that for a totally mechanically conceived, purely formally or syntactically specified system we must minimally presuppose two things to be able to maintain that the system is referential, that is, that it can sustain the correspondence conception of truth: we must presuppose (1) that the system is consistent, and (2) that it contains true but unprovable sentences – that is, well-formed formulas that represent truths, though we cannot derive them as theorems.[11]

The first of these conditions is relatively easy to justify. By the laws of classical logic,[12] out of a formal contradiction everything follows (ex contradictione quodlibet sequitur – ECQ). This means that if our system were inconsistent – that is, if it could prove a contradiction – then it would prove every formula. If every formula were true, then truth obviously could not be used in the correspondence sense; it just would not make sense to maintain that every state of affairs exists at the same time. It is therefore clear that the formal consistency of the system is an indispensable precondition for formulating any notion of truth in the correspondence sense.

Unlike this first condition, however, the second – that is, that the system should contain true but unprovable sentences – is thoroughly problematic. For starters, as Tarski proved, the concept of truth cannot be formulated inside a given formal system.[13] Consequently, and secondly, if we assume true but unprovable sentences, we beg the question, that is, we assume that we know what truth is before we could

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[10] This situation is closely analogous to the philosophical problem usually referred to as the "paradox of analysis." This paradox was first pointed out by G. E. Moore and received its classic formulation from C. H. Langford, which runs thus:

Let us call what is to be analyzed the analysandum, and let us call that which does the analysing the analysans. The analysis then states an appropriate relation of equivalence between the analysandum and the analysans. And the paradox of analysis is to the effect that, if the verbal expression representing the analysandum has the same meaning as the verbal expression representing the analysans, the analysis states a bare identity and is trivial; but if the two verbal expressions do not have the same meaning, the analysis is incorrect. (Langford 1968, 323) Cf. also (Norris 2012, 141).

[11] The first of these requirements is intuitively obvious. The second can be formulated in several different ways. That all these different ways can be summarized and succinctly stated in this one requirement of the presence of true but unprovable sentences is something that I arrived at as a result of an analysis of Tarski's invocation of the principle of the excluded middle in his (Tarski 1983).

[12] By "classical logic" I simply mean the standard logic of mathematical practice (by and large the propositional and predicate calculuses), as distinct from, for example, intuitionistic logic or paraconsistent logics.

[13] This is what is usually referred to as "Tarski's Theorem" and he first presented it in the "Postscript" to his (Tarski 1983, 268–277).

ground this concept. Thirdly, and for us most importantly, this would involve a naïve presupposition of the independent, objective existence of reality: for us to know that the true but unprovable sentence is true, we would need to assume that we have access to the state of affairs the sentence refers to before formulating this knowledge in the sentence itself.

The first two of these consequences seem to me to be inevitable: since the concept of truth cannot be expressed in a consistent formal system, any account of reference will to some extent beg the question. For any such account we will need to assume an external point of view, we will have to presuppose at least the possibility of reference. But does this mean that we likewise need a naïve presupposition of objective existence? Not necessarily. One of the central claims of my book is precisely this: that we *can* ground reference for formal systems without presupposing an objective reality. But for this we need first Gödel's insight about the inevitable presence of undecidable sentences in formal systems, and secondly, Derrida's insight about the role of this undecidability in grounding the possibility of reference.

4. The Gödelian Insight

Let us examine these insights one by one. What Gödel showed in his famous 1931 paper "On Formally Undecidable Propositions Of *Principia Mathematica* And Related Systems" (Gödel 1992) is that – although we cannot establish true but unprovable sentences inside a formal system – we *can* always produce undecidable formulas inside such a system on strictly formal grounds. He demonstrated this in two steps, both of which required remarkable genius and neither of which will I be able to represent in any depth, so I am just giving a sketch of Gödel's procedure:[14]

First, he proved that statements *about* the formal system can be translated into statements *in* the formal system. Thus, statements such as "formula x has a proof in the system" can be directly transformed into well-formed formulas of the system itself. He showed, in other words, that formal systems are capable of reflecting their own operations, that they can represent their own syntax.

Second, he showed how we can formulate an undecidable sentence on this basis. As illustration, consider the sentence "the nth well-formed formula is not on the list of TNT theorems." This is a clear and unambiguous statement about the functioning

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[14] Several accessible accounts of Gödel's procedure are now available, such as (Hofstadter 1979) (Berto 2009) (Smullyan 1992) (Franzén 2005, 10–57) (Wright 1994, 185-186). In what follows I will adapt – and further simplify – Roger Penrose's simple but elegant account in *The Emperor's New Mind* (Penrose 1989, 138–141).

of TNT, so – on the basis of the first point above – we can formulate it as a well-formed formula of TNT itself. As such it will be listed among the well-formed formulas of the system (such a listing, as we have seen, is always possible) and will be assigned a unique number: the kth well-formed formula, say. Now n is a free variable in our formula, which means that it can be replaced by any concrete natural number. This formula will, therefore, give rise to an infinite family of formulas: "the first well-formed formula is not on the list", "the second well-formed formula is not on the list", etc. In the case of each of these formulas we can check if what they state is actually true or not. We can seek a proof for the first well-formed formula, then for the second, and so on. In each case, we will in theory be able to determine if the given formula has a proof inside the system or not. But what happens if we come to the kth formula on the list and substitute k for n? This will be a perfectly legitimate formula, just like any other on the list of well-formed formulas. However, it will make a statement, curiously enough, about itself. It will state, to be precise, that it is not on the list of theorems.[15] Will this formula then be on the list of theorems? If it is, then we will end up with a contradiction, for what the formula states is precisely that it is not on the list. If, on the other hand, it is not on the list, then – by a law of formal logic – its negation must be on the list, which asserts that the original formula is on the list, and this will again lead us to a contradiction. This means that neither the formula itself nor its negation can be on the list of theorems – assuming only that the formal system is consistent. This formula, in other words, will be neither provable, nor disprovable: it will be *undecidable*.

This is of course a rather drastically simplified and not even entirely consistent demonstration of Gödel's procedure, but the idea relevant for us here is that Gödel could demonstrate beyond doubt that in any formal system of the type we are discussing here there will always be such undecidable formulas. How does this modify the situation in regard to our ambition to ground the reference of formal systems? Remember that for establishing the correspondence conception of truth we need – apart from assuming the consistency of the system – true but unprovable formulas. Since by Tarski's Theorem we cannot capture the concept of truth inside the system, we do not seem to be much better off now that we have established the existence

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[15] Penrose establishes this by first pointing out that a list of all propositional functions that depend on a single variable can in principle be compiled. Then he shows that the propositional function that asserts that the nth propositional function on this list has no proof in the system is a propositional function that depends on a single variable and must therefore be included in the list comprised of all such propositional functions. This means that it must have a unique ordinal number assigned to it, say it is the kth propositional function on the list. Finally, Penrose obtains the Gödel sentence by substituting k for n, which results in the kth propositional function asserting about itself that it has no proof in the system. (Penrose 1989, 138–140)

of undecidable formulas. Undecidable formulas are certainly unprovable, but why should they be true? This question cannot be answered in a fully convincing way. Assuming the truth of undecidable sentences will always remain just an assumption, which we need in order to account for the reference of formal systems.

However, there is a sense in which we are still somewhat better off once we have undecidable sentences. For if we have undecidable sentences, then it is clear that we *can* assume the existence of true but unprovable sentences. We can do so simply because the undecidable formula is clearly beyond what the system can mechanically control: since it is undecidable, it is clearly unprovable and as such it *could* be true for all we know. There is no way we can formally prove the contrary by means of our formal system. What is more, with this conception in mind we become capable of developing a new sense of the truth of true but unprovable sentences (which we must illegitimately assume anyway), a sense which does not require presupposing objective existence. It is for this step that we need the Derridean insight. Let us see how.

5. The Derridean Insight

So, what does the truth of the undecidable sentence (or of its negation)[16] mean if we choose to assume it to be true? The intuitive interpretation is of course that it means that it is true in the correspondence sense – that is, by virtue of referring to an objective state of affairs which exists. This was actually Gödel's own interpretation, too: if we have two contradictory sentences such that one is the negation of the other, we must conclude that one of them is true. In the case of the undecidable sentence, we know furthermore that neither it nor its negation can be proved, and this leads directly to the conclusion that there are truths that simply cannot be captured by the formal system. If we interpret truth here in the correspondence sense, then this means that there are certain states of affairs which our system just cannot grasp. No matter how we set up a formal system, the reality that it refers to will always exceed the capacities of the system: it will always be in excess of whatever system we design to refer to it.[17] For Gödel, therefore, the inevitable presence of

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[16] If we view the undecidable formula simply as a syntactic construction, the assumption of its truth is just as valid as the assumption of the truth of its negation, since the requirement of consistency only demands that they must not both be true at the same time. In what follows I will only talk about assuming the truth of the undecidable formula itself, but the argument can also apply – with some complications that I will not go into here – if we assume the truth of its negation.

[17] Gödel was of course more subtle than this when formulating his position (cf. especially his (Gödel 1995a) and (Gödel 1995b)). Nonetheless, he was a mathematical Platonist, meaning that he believed in the independent existence of an objective mathematical reality beyond that which can be grasped in formal systems. For an account of Gödel which emphasizes this realist streak in his thought see (Goldstein 2005).

undecidable formulas marks a fundamental incapacity of any formal system, the impossibility of grasping reality, or even a well-defined segment of it, in its entirety. This is also expressed in the name of the theorems he based on his demonstration of the existence of formally undecidable sentences: these are called the *incompleteness* theorems, implying that any formal system is incomplete in the sense that it cannot prove all truths about the reality it describes.[18]

Must we, however, interpret the inevitable presence of undecidable sentences as a limitation? One of the central insights of deconstruction is that we do not need to. For we can also consider such limitations, such impossibilities, as necessary conditions for a possibility. As Giorgio Agamben puts it in "Pardes," his homage to Derrida:

> It does not suffice, however, to underline (on the basis of Gödel's theorem) the necessary relation between a determinate axiomatics and undecidable propositions: what is decisive is solely how one conceives this relation. It is possible to consider an undecidable as a purely negative limit (Kant's *Schranke*), such that one then invokes strategies (Bertrand Russell's theory of types or Alfred Tarski's metalanguage) to avoid running up against it. Or one can consider it as a *threshold* (Kant's *Grenze*), which opens onto an exteriority and transforms and dislocates all the elements of the system. (Agamben 1999, 214)

Agamben's point is of course that deconstruction follows the second path. Derrida's undecidables, such as the hymen, the trace, the supplement, the gift, hospitality, etc., are thresholds. Naturally, they mark a fundamental impossibility, but an impossibility which is also the condition of the possibility of that which they render impossible. And I think we can use this insight to reinterpret the function of the inevitable undecidable formula in any formal system. In particular, we can interpret the impossibility of reference marked by Gödel's undecidable formula in a given formal system as the condition of the possibility for this system to be referential at all, to make reference to something other than itself. We have seen that without undecidable sentences, formal systems cannot be considered referential: they cannot refer to anything other than themselves, since they are only capable of exhibiting "an idle running of language." With undecidable sentences, however, it becomes possible to assume the truth of these sentences and thus we become capable of accounting for reference. The undecidable sentence itself is of course a

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[18] This is, incidentally, the line the famous "Gödelian arguments" of John Lucas, Roger Penrose, and Stanley Jáki also take (Lucas 1961) (Lucas 1996) (Penrose 1989) (Penrose 1994) (Jáki 1966) (Jáki 2004).

point at which the functioning of the system breaks down, thus marking a point where reference is certainly impossible. As such, however, it provides a ground for assuming the possibility of reference. In fact, it is alone capable of establishing that a formal system can be more than just "an idle running of language"; it can alone guarantee that we can think of the other sentences of the system as referential in the correspondence sense; that is, as being made true or false according to the existence or non-existence of certain objective facts.

For this, however, it is not enough to have undecidable sentences. We must also assume the undecidable sentence to be *true*, and this brings us back to the original question: in what sense can the undecidable sentence be assumed to be true? We have seen that assuming its truth in the correspondence sense leads directly to Gödel's Platonism, to the excess of reality over the system, and thus inevitably to a naïve presupposition of the objective existence of reality. This, however, is not the only possible interpretation of the truth of undecidable sentences. For – and this is another Derridean insight – the undecidable can also be interpreted as marking – as Derrida puts it in relation to the hymen in *The Double Session* – "the irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic" (Derrida 1981b, 230).

That this possibility is indeed available becomes clear if we examine the situation arising from the requirement of true but unprovable sentences. For, as we have seen, we need true but unprovable sentences to be able to ground reference for a formal system in the correspondence sense. This means that – since we cannot establish the existence of such sentences by a formal proof – we must *presuppose* them *before* establishing the correspondence conception of truth. Therefore, the truth of the undecidable sentences is a *precondition* of this conception and does not need to be bound by it. Assuming that the undecidable sentence is true in the correspondence sense can at best be a retrospective projection of a sense of "true" that can only be established *after* we have presupposed the truth of undecidable sentences. Therefore, while it is true that the correspondence conception of truth depends on and is determined by the truth of the undecidable formula, the sense in which the latter is true need not be determined by the former.

The question that remains to be asked is "Can the undecidable formula (or its negation) be assumed to be true in any sense other than correspondence?" And this is where the Derridean insight cited above can again come to our assistance. For it highlights the possibility that the undecidable formula can be seen as referring solely to the syntactic system itself. If we interpret the truth of the undecidable formula in this way, then it will be true not of some preexisting, independent and

objective reality, but of the formal system itself as a referential system. For if we do not presuppose the objective existence of reality, then the truth of the undecidable formula will simply mean that in any system we set up to refer to some reality there will always be formulas that must be true *regardless of* how things are in reality. The truth of such a formula will therefore depend not on an objective, independently existing state of affairs, but only on the formal requirements of our system, only on its syntax. The truth of undecidable formulas will thus attest to the independence of the system from any reality and will mark the excess of the syntactic system over whatever reality it refers to.[19]

Relying on this sense of the truth of the undecidable formula we become capable of grounding an account of truth as correspondence between a formal system and reality, or, in other words, we become capable of accounting for the reference of formal systems. What is more, we become capable of doing this without a naïve presupposition of objective existence. For by exhibiting a formula whose truth certainly does not depend on any objective existence, we can establish the independence of the formal system, its autonomy from any reality that it may refer to. We can establish, in other words, that the formal system is not reality. And once we have thus established the independence of the system, we become capable of assuming that it is independent *from something other than itself*. In this way, therefore, what seemed to be an incapacity, an impossibility in the formal system, turns out to be the ultimate condition of the possibility of grounding its reference. Because the system can be thought of as independent, we *can* think that it is related to something entirely other than itself.

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[19] Whether such an interpretation makes any sense in the context of formal systems and their reference is of course not self-evident, and one of the major tasks I had to face in my book was to develop the precise sense in which this view of the truth of the undecidable formula can be meaningful in such contexts as, for example, the truth of arithmetical propositions.

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The Host Hosted
Hospitality and the Recognition of the Host in Heinrich von Kleist's *Amphitryon*

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Abstract

My article focuses on the Derridean aporias of unconditional and conditional hospitality. I argue that Kleist's play *Amphitryon* performs a two-fold deconstruction of the elementary conventions of hospitality. First, hospitality is practiced only after the guest is (falsely) recognized as the head of the household, which on the one hand confronts us with the impossibility of hosting the host, but on the other hand points to a possible condition of unconditional hospitality, which is the anonymity – and hence interchangeability – of the guest and the host. Second, and not independently from the first, Kleist's play also illuminates not-knowing or the unknown as a key factor of hospitality, which makes hospitality an open secret in the sense that its conditions are never fully revealed but have never been fully concealed either.

Keywords

Conditionality, Jacques Derrida, doubles, enemy, hospitality, hostipitality, invitation, Heinrich von Kleist, open secret, the unknown

1. Introduction

After Jacques Derrida's so-called ethical turn in the 1990s, which brought with it highly influential theorems such as zoopoetics (Derrida 2008, 6; see Driscoll and Hoffmann 2018) or gift-giving as a non-transitory event (Derrida 1995), hospitality or "hostipitality" became one of his more inherently paradoxical concepts. Not only because the French word *hôte* has a double meaning, designating both the host and the guest, the latter of whom can turn out to be either a friend or a hostile stranger (Derrida 2000a, 3), but also because unconditional hospitality can only be achieved through several restrictions.

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This is an inevitable and incessant transgression which Derrida calls "the step of hospitality" which at the same time means no hospitality: *pas d'hospitalité.* This step is taken by the host, who can only guarantee hospitality within certain limits, and the guest, who crosses these limits; first of all the threshold of the house (Derrida 2000b, 75). This is why Derrida concludes that hospitality is always a step from one impossibility to another, it is sheer impossibility, because for unconditional hospitality to happen, it must be conditional: one of its conditions is that "the conditions, the norms, the rights" (77) and laws have to be transgressed in order to take the step *of* and *to* hospitality, but such conditions are what make the transgression possible in the first place.

In my article, I first discuss the paradoxes, limits, and conditions of hospitality as conceptualized by Derrida. Second, I interpret hospitality in Heinrich von Kleist's play *Amphitryon* as an act that is eminently based on the unknown, or more accurately the not-known, on something unbeknownst to those involved in the event of hospitality which is nevertheless performed – a dynamic similar to that of the open secret. Third, I examine the two main doubles in the play, Sosias/Mercury and Amphitryon/Jupiter, in terms of the relationship between the host and guest. Fourth, I conclude with the consequences that the situation of the host being hosted creates for the act of invitation as a conventional element of hospitality.

2. Hospitality in and out of Bounds

If we take a closer look at the aporia of the interdependence between conditionality and unconditionality, we can see that it stems from the fact, already alluded to above, that there are several limitations at play in Derrida's idea of hospitality. Lóránt Kicsák argues that hospitality can be broken down to a moment of decision-making, when it is not the content (i.e., the issue on which a decision must be made, or the goal or consequence of the decision) that counts; instead, the emphasis is on the act itself (Kicsák 2023, 27). In other words, a decision must be made which establishes a relationship between the present situation of conditional hospitality and the universality of unconditional hospitality. This also presupposes an openness to an incalculable future horizon that is necessary for such a decision, the consequence of which is a promise in a broader sense. It is a promise made by the host in such a way that they are willing to receive the guest: the promise is thus an invitation that the host can be taken up on and which makes the host indebted to the guest before the guest is indebted to the host.

This dynamic of promising hospitality – the promise as invitation and debt to the other – recalls ideas from Nietzsche's seminal work *On the Genealogy of Morality*, in which the ability to make a promise is indispensable to culture insofar as the latter is based on institutionalized forms of memory. According to Nietzsche, the foundation of culture occurred at the very moment when the one who made the promise could be reminded of the promise and rightfully taken up on it (Nietzsche 2006, 35–6). In the context of Derridean hospitality, the debt that constitutes the temporal frame for culture in which rights and duties are established – i.e., one can make a promise and thus be held to one's word – can be interpreted as the debt of the guest, which is nevertheless conditioned by and contingent upon the existence of rights and duties through a temporal double-bind. But the possession of rights is not itself absolute, since it is not granted unconditionally: the guest has not only a right in relation to the host, but also a duty to behave properly in relation to the host; that is, to respect the host's rights. It is compliance with this duty that ensures the continued possession of one's rights as a guest (Kakoliris 2015, 146). Derrida also reminds us, however, that without the host's right to a home, despite the restriction on hospitality that this ownership might imply, there is no opening or passage to hospitality (Derrida 2000a, 3), and thus no right or debt to hospitality to ensure that the moment for the decision about hospitality arises (Kakoliris 2015, 150).

Making a promise also constitutes a community, a kind of "mutual belonging" that is preceded by a decision and serves as the basis for all subsequent decisions: a promise is a decision about what we share with whom, and therefore what we deny to others (Derrida 2005a, 80). Derrida remarks that the figure of the enemy, interpreted exhaustively by Carl Schmitt, is helpful in the sense that it constitutes a border that is clearly identifiable and signifies the limits of communal belonging (83). Considering that the sovereignty of the host depends on the right to refuse entry, to not extend the invitation (i.e., the promise of hospitality) to certain people, it is easy to evaluate the importance of the stranger who is at once a threatening force and a guarantee of togetherness (Derrida 2005b, 11). Giving the stranger a name further illuminates their "delimiting" role, whether we call them a friend, who can take that step to hospitality by crossing the threshold, or an enemy, who has to remain outside the boundaries of the household.

The demarcation of the role of the enemy, the host, the guest, or the stranger – who may turn out to be any of the above – occurs through naming. This is why Derrida suggests that absolute hospitality does not need words, since it would lead to a decision about the identity of the stranger beforehand (Derrida 2000b, 15–7).

Still, language seems necessary, since without it no conventions could be enacted. In other words, without the use of words, no restrictions would be placed on the guest, but nor would there be any framework to welcome them into the household. The unnamed and unidentified stranger, who is neither compelled to confess nor forcibly assigned an identity, is the exact opposite of the Schmittian figure of the enemy, to which Derrida often refers in his analysis of friendship and hospitality – especially with regard to how Carl Schmitt introduces meticulous distinctions into the said figure. For instance, Schmitt distinguishes between the enemy with whom there is no friendship and hospitality, as was the case between the Greeks and the barbarians (Schmitt 2006, 163), those who are regarded as mere enemies, and those to whom this right is denied, such as rogues, rebels, and traitors (164). However, as Derrida points out, while the figure of the enemy is indispensable to Schmitt's thought insofar as it serves as a model for all other figurative differentiations, the distinction between enemy and friend, as well as within the figure of the enemy itself, can be blurred. Not only because "the antithesis of friendship *in the political sphere* is not […] *enmity* but *hostility*" (Derrida 2005b, 87 [italics in original]), which would yield to the lack of sentiment and affection, so that the enemy would be the stranger who is approached without xenophobia – and not the other way around, so that everyone who is the target of xenophobia is categorized as a stranger – but also because one can be hostile towards a friend in public and love their enemy in private (88). Consequently, unlike in the political sphere or the world of the law, the roles of friend and enemy can overlap in hospitality, and such inextricabilities also introduce the dialectics of the private and the public that can be translated back into the relationship between the laws of the household and those laws that cross a single threshold and are thus enacted across multiple households.

As Schmitt notes, the space of the law has undergone many changes, the most prominent of which is probably the transition from nomadic fields to the fixed household (*oikos*), the latter characterized by proper land appropriation that establishes a stable order, in the enforcement of which the law opens up (Schmitt 2006, 341). This dynamic of the law returns in Derrida's idea that hospitality requires a household while also establishing what a household is – similar to how the law that transgresses itself is the law of hospitality:

> The antinomy of hospitality irreconcilably opposes *The* law, in its universal singularity, to a plurality that is not only a dispersal (laws in the plural), but a structured multiplicity, determined by a process of division and differentiation […] It would risk being abstract, utopian, illusory, and so turning over into its opposite.

In order to be what it is, the law thus needs the laws, which, however, deny it, or at any rate threaten it, sometimes corrupt or pervert it. (Derrida 2000b, 79)

Another set of limitations that contribute to the inherently paradoxical nature of unconditional hospitality is discussed by Giustino de Michele. He emphasizes the different kinds of finitude that Derrida considered necessary for authentic hospitality to take place (de Michele 2023, 88). First, hospitality requires the finitude of space, whether we mean leaving a particular territory in the case of the exile, or the threshold and door of a house in which one finds refuge. As the German media-theorist Bernhard Siegert notes "[a] door is a place where the difference that constitutes the law has to negate itself in order to become effective," while the threshold "is a zone that belongs neither to the inside nor the outside" (Siegert 2015, 194). The limitations introduced by the door and the threshold as markers of spatial finitude are the elementary condition of opening up for the other, who enters a new world by crossing the threshold – a rite of passage that provides a new identity, often proposed as transfiguration. Second, there is temporal finitude: the guest remains a guest only as long as they do not intrude, or until they become a member of the household, which, alongside becoming a parasite, is one possible consequence of overstaying one's welcome. And third, there is the finitude of life and power: as Derrida reminds us, the constituent of the word "hospitality" is not only *hostis* (host, hostility, etc.) but also *potis*, which is related to words such as *potentia* and *potentis*, expressing mastery and sovereignty, even in the unlimited form of the des*pot*. Consequently, there is an essential "self-restraint" in the idea of hospitality (Derrida 2000a, 13) that maintains the distance between what belongs to the host and the guest respectively, on the one hand, and the power of the host to remain master of their house, on the other, so that they can invite the guest into it. Therefore, the one who has unlimited power can be neither host nor guest.

Following Plautus and Molière, Kleist's play *Amphitryon* builds on these paradoxical and transversal elements of hospitality, especially with regard to two factors: the act of decision-making and the productive limits of finitude. The impossibility of decision-making comes to the fore when the problem of identifying the real Amphitryon arises. It is a question closely related to distinguishing between guest and host, the main conflict around which the play revolves. In *Amphitryon*, the question of hospitality comes down to the hospitability of the host, in a sense that it is the host who is being hosted. And as for finitude, Jupiter, an omnipotent god, towards the end of the play demands of the real host, the real Amphitryon, to "recognize how noble is / My ancestry and that I'm lord in Thebes. / Mine shall he

call the fertile fields of Thebes; / […] / And mine, this house; and mine, the mistress / Who dwells within it quietly" (Kleist 1962, 65). But only by disguising himself as Amphitryon – that is, by masking himself as a mortal – can he make himself hospitable. As obvious as this masking and the dramaturgy of doubles are to the recipients of the play (its readers or the audience), it is precisely the misrecognition of the host that makes it possible to interpret not only the actors' actions on stage as theatrical presence, but also the characters' actions in the household, thereby creating a metalepsis through which the paradoxical conventions of hospitality can be staged. Rather than abusing them, Kleist's characters unknowingly endorse and act out the self-transgressive conventions in the Derridean notion of hospitality.

3. The Interchangeability of the Host and the Guest: Hospitality as an Open Secret

I argue that Heinrich von Kleist's *Amphitryon* stages most of the aporias of hospitality outlined above: the indistinguishability of host and guest, the latter of whom may be hostile or friendly; the conditionality of unconditional hospitality, and the self-establishment and self-transgression of the law. To demonstrate these impossibilities inherent to hospitality, Kleist's play presents a situation in which the host is hosted, or more precisely, the one whose intentions are interpreted as hostile, the abusive god Jupiter, is taken as the host and in the end praises the household for its hospitality.

Since Kleist's version of *Amphitryon* began as a translation of Molière's popular play, he already used Amphitryon and Sosias as telling names or aptronyms: the former means "the good host" and the latter "the double," as popularized by Molière (see Lacan 1991, 259). Kleist also added miraculous episodes, such as the displacement of the diadem from the gilded box given to Alcmene by her husband, or the transformation of the letter on its seal from A to J. The magic (*Reiz* '[de]light') sparked by the communion of Alcmene and Jupiter as Amphitryon (Kleist 1962, 16–7), however, soon turns into madness (*Wahn*) when Alcmene and Charis investigate the miraculous transformation of the capital letter, which now designates Jupiter, who stands in for Alcmene's husband, instead of Amphitryon. Turning wonder into delusion clearly distinguishes Kleist's version from the tongue-in-cheek comic

atmosphere of Molière's (see e.g., Szukala 2013, 38–9).[2] Moreover, one element that is almost entirely Kleist's invention is the third act, in which public testimony is required for the decision about hospitality, that is, the recognition of the host as a guest and *vice versa* – the main thematic paradox of *Amphitryon* – when Alcmene has to identify her real husband (Kleist 1962, 75) in front of military men and the general public.

In Kleist's play, hospitality is practiced only after the guest is (falsely) recognized as the head of the household, which on the one hand confronts us with the impossibility of hosting the host, but on the other hand points to a possible condition of unconditional hospitality, namely the anonymity – and hence interchangeability – of guest and host. And just as in Kleist's short story *The Marquise of O*, where the protagonist submits an article to the paper to identify the father of her unborn child, in *Amphitryon* Alcmene's testimony about her husband must also be supported by the public; in the case of the latter, by the comrades of her real husband, who give her the right of identification, and by those heralds who would spread the news (76). Alcmene's testimony not only stands on the threshold between privacy and publicity, but also executes the reconstruction of an event that is only accessible through the referentialization of conditions (see Lőrincz 2016, 242–3), an act proposed as an iteration of mistaking the guest for the host. In other words, unbeknownst to her, the decision about which of the two Amphitryons is her husband is also a decision about who the host and the guest are. Furthermore, the reason why Alcmene's hosting of Jupiter as Amphitryon cannot be testified *by* and *to* the public is that the identification of her husband is already an iteration of the unconscious, or better to say, unknown decision about remaining faithful or accepting the divine gift, her future demigod child, Hercules.

Like public testimony, this "unknown" (*unwissentlich*) is a recurring theme in Kleist's work, and it also plays an important role in *The Marquise of O*. On the one hand, *unwissentlich* is the substitution of "immaculate" as in the immaculate conception, which is acted out in the play via the interchangeability of host and guest: Alcmene gets pregnant by a god because the double stands in for the original and gives birth to a new character – an iteration yet again. On the other hand, the unknown encompasses not knowing who the guest and the host are, which is

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[2] This transfiguration from wonder to delusion also brings Kleist's dramaturgy closer to a Shakespearean model. While it is common in the reception of the play to refer to the dramaturgy of a comedy of errors (see e.g., Wittkowski and Riechel 1971), Kleist's version of *Amphitryon* shares dramaturgical elements not only with Shakespeare's comedies but also with his tragedies. Alcmene's being tortured by visions bears some resemblance to Lear's or Macbeth's fate, while the haunting delusions triggered by members of the household was a favored leitmotif among Shakespeare's contemporaries as well, it is enough to think of John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.

presented as a precondition for hospitality; a false testimony, or one might even say, a lie that the guest is the host, is what makes hospitality possible (196). However, Jupiter masking himself as Amphitryon also implies another "lie", namely that he is not the host of the household – he repeatedly brings this up to Alcmene – so that he can be hosted (Kleist 1962, 19). The unknown or not knowing is nevertheless constitutive of the decision about hospitality, not only because it preserves the stranger as unnamed, unfamiliar, and unidentified, but because it relieves the host of their conventional responsibilities – so that Jupiter disguised as the host can be a guest in Amphitryon's house.

This structure disrupts the conventions of conditional hospitality and introduces turmoil and disturbance among the characters. In Csongor Lőrincz's interpretation of another of Kleist's short stories, *The Betrothal in Santo Domingo*, a speech act such as the identification of the host or the guest, or a testimony about who is which, becomes intelligible only when it is ratified as such by contract or convention (Lőrincz 2016, 204). In *Amphitryon*, however, it is a false testimony as a speech act that makes all other acts of hospitality intelligible and valid. Consequently, the inextricability of the unknown and the false at play in decisions, identifications, and testimonies enacts hospitality as an open secret, in the sense that the conditions of hospitality are never fully revealed but are never entirely concealed either. According to Lőrincz, there is always a threshold in operation in Kleist's work that allows someone to make a testimony about what they have done but not about who they are (197): it is no wonder that when Amphitryon realizes that he must have had a double all along, he says that this "other" has taken away his figure and his deeds (*Gestalt und Art*) (Kleist 1962, 57). Therefore, unconditional hospitality can be perceived

> as a disruption of some domestic order, but primarily as a real threat to the unity of the SELF. The more we perceive the subject as a certain inviolable, harmonious whole and fullness, the greater is the threat associated with the arriving outsider. Then the person is perceived as an interloper, carrying the risk of intrusion and disruption of the subjective individuality, sovereignty. (Marzec 2011, 24).

The unraveling of the paradoxes of how the host can be hosted, how a decision can be made about the identity of the host and the guest, and how the stranger makes hospitality possible by dislocating fixed roles and identities evokes the dynamic of the open secret.[3] While the open secret is usually understood as a

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[3] I would like to thank Andrea Timár at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest for recommending this concept to me.

piece of knowledge that cannot be acted upon and lacks the private claim of a secret, it is also a means of protection that grants the privilege of ignoring rather than claiming a piece of knowledge (François 2008, 2). Not only does the open secret challenge axioms of the Enlightenment, such as "knowledge is power," and constitute a non-rational discourse, it also helps to reevaluate a dramatic situation (3) that is conventionally interpreted either as something that contributes very little to nothing to the plot or as something indispensable to prevent an event, so that this prevention itself can become an event in its own right. The decision not to act, however, does not necessarily have to be interpreted as passivity. Instead, it is a "gesture of self-canceling revelation [that] permits a release from the ethical imperative to act upon knowledge" (3). However, in the context of Kleist's play, which revolves around hospitality based on misrecognition, the quoted sentence about the open secret presumes a certain amount of ambiguity, so that the relief from acting upon knowledge gives way to the kind of unconditional hospitality that Derrida aspired to. Thus, in the dynamic of the open secret the element of not-knowing or ignorance becomes a key factor, rather than the claim or demonstration of knowledge. And ignorance as a constitutive feature of unconditional hospitality is present throughout Kleist's play when the guest is mistaken for the host. In *Amphitryon*, Alcmene's perception of Jupiter as her husband is a decision that has been made unknowingly, but if this indispensable element of hosting him as the host is approached in terms of the open secret, then she can no longer be regarded as a character who passively suffers the deception of a god, rather as having the agency of recognition by letting Jupiter dwell in the form of the host, even though he is still treated as a guest.

Such an inclination or deferral between insight and action, which is nonetheless characteristic of the open secret, often calls for free indirect style, as Anne-Lise François notes. And even though she applies the theorem to novels and narratives, her remark that indirect speech frees the character from self-representation (François 2008, 14), which would consist in a constant report on one's agency and the analysis of the connection between causes and effects, motivations and actions, conditions and executions, etc., applies all the more to dramatic forms. Jupiter speaks directly about his identity, while Alcmene unknowingly accepts his identity as her husband's without having to say it out loud (Kleist 1962, 19). But hospitality still occurs, since Jupiter is hosted in lieu of the host and is taken to be the host. This paradox does not need to be articulated; in fact, it can only happen so long as it is unknowingly acknowledged but not expressed – as an open secret should be – for the play's dramaturgy to work.

Consequently, "'unclaimed' experience needs no more [to] signify 'traumatic' experience than 'unvocalized' experience needs [to] signify 'unrealized' experience" (François 2008, 18). The indirectness of the open secret, however, is not simply a distancing or alienating effect, or paradoxical in the sense that despite giving a second-hand account, indirect style can still be presented as an exhaustive description of the self. On such merits, the open secret can be interpreted as a statement whose content completely eludes the character (see 18–9) or even the object that it refers to. If the discourse of the open secret is understood in this way, it explains why Jupiter does not unmask himself until the very end, as well as why Alcmene iterates what has been said between them earlier, at key moments when she is threatened with going mad: first to Charis (Kleist 1962, 42), then to the real Amphitryon (77). The indirect repetition of what has been said suspends the dichotomy of identification and non-identification, which also happens not to the title-character, but to his servant, Sosias. He repeatedly reports to Amphitryon (24–5) and Alcmene, and the play begins with him practicing his role as messenger (3). Then he repeats Mercury's (his double's) words as if they were his own (15). The one who is supposed to be the host, the real Amphitryon is thus (mis)quoted and addressed in indirect speech, but Amphitryon himself never employs this technique: the missing host, who is replaced by the guest, thus becomes the subject of the open secret.

4. The I and Its Doubles

Through the character of Sosias, hospitality is also inextricably linked to the play's main theme of identity and mirror images. On his way home to tell the lady of the house of her husband's victory, Sosias keeps distinguishing between friend and foe (4) and is identified by his double, Mercury, as acting as if he were the master of the household (10). Sosias, in turn, identifies Mercury as someone like himself, albeit a stranger, who can be defeated with some help from the gate (whether by pushing the other into it or taking refuge behind it). The *Me*s and *I*s that Sosias utters and with which he tries to identify himself are soon taken hostage by his double, who also assumes his role as a servant (11). From being the host's right hand, a gatekeeper, Sosias becomes the intruder, held hostage by the true intruder: bound by giving up his identity through an oath that he recognizes Mercury as himself – a similar situation of being taken hostage by an oath was analyzed by Derrida in the play *Oedipus at Colonus* (Derrida 2000b, 107).

The taking of hostages, however, can only take place within the confines of the house to which they belong. This situation is turned upside down when Mercury

takes Sosias hostage outside: when Sosias says that he is now on his way (Kleist 1962, 15 – "mein Weg" in the original) and then approaches the house, he is denied entry by Mercury, who is now posing as the household servant. This is a twofold event: on the one hand, Mercury forces Sosias – the double of whom he has become – to perform his (new) identity, which is determined by a higher power who has chosen to become a mortal gatekeeper. On the other hand, even though Mercury belongs to the realm of the immortals, theatrically he is a foil, his character created as a complement to that of Sosias, yet by snatching his identity, he fundamentally influences his fate – one might say: he cancels it altogether – which refers back to the dramaturgy of ancient tragedies and thus to the original *Amphitryon*. And while Mercury chooses to assume that identity, Sosias cannot choose his identity, since he says: "I'm not Sosias, who I am. / For something, you'll admit, I have to be" (15). By taking his name, Mercury also takes away not only what Sosias is called, but also his calling (*Beruf*), which eventually draws Sosias into an intersubjective relation in which he would have to assume an identity that is not determined by conventions; differently put, his identity is no longer determined either by genealogy (13) or by his position in the economics of the household. And as for Mercury's reception, it is a parodistic situation as far as the conditions of hospitality are concerned, since instead of the stranger being forced to reveal his identity, he reveals his name as that of the gatekeeper: he literally takes a name for himself from a distinguished member of the household – from the one who stands in for the host in his absence – and then he stands in for him. In this case, the stranger is not responsible for his actions (cf. Derrida 2000b, 27) but defers responsibility and punishment: Sosias is blamed for Mercury's mischief, and the latter even gives him a beating as a divine gift (Kleist 1962, 16). Therefore, the event of hospitality that takes place between them frees Sosias from the path already determined for him by his genealogy, fate, etc., and the god becomes hospitable by standing in for a mortal who has already stood in for the host.

While Sosias has only one name, Amphitryon has many, according to Alcmene: "'Tis true, whene'er the populace rejoices in you / And spends its rapture in each of your great names" (17). And although Jupiter is often interpreted as a rapist in the play, he is also the one who challenges the conventions of hospitality by distinguishing between Amphitryon's names and identities. When he inquires whether he is welcomed as a lover or a husband (18) – which also means asking Alcmene whether she loves Amphitryon the victorious general or Amphitryon the passionate man – Alcmene brings up the laws of hospitality, which in this case are

intertwined with the laws of marriage. Jupiter responds by saying that "[t]o think that you're complying with a legal form / Which you imagine binding" (19), but his discourse is soon littered with militarized tropes. On the one hand, he starts echoing Sosias's *geschlagene* ('being beaten,' Sosias used this word when summing up his encounter with Mercury), henceforth establishing another possible mirror relation between Sosias and Amphitryon, servant and master, which further supports his disguise. On the other hand, the iteration of *besiegene*, that is 'besieger, defeater,' raises the question of whether the guest, the one who is welcomed into the house, can appear as a conqueror (18). The Derridean notion of unconditional hospitality, however, allows for such an unannounced or uninvited guest, whose arrival can be codified as an intrusion or invasion; a violation of the domestic order that turns conventions upside down (Derrida 2000b, 22). But such an intrusion can also mean the annulment of conditionality, the transgression of the host's law, especially when someone close to the host visits and makes themselves at home. Jupiter, pretending to be Amphitryon, literally invades the household of the host in whose place he stands in order to be hosted.

While Jupiter's intentions can be interpreted as a desire that finds satisfaction in the self-referential recognition of his own greatness by his beloved (Szukala 2013, 39), it can also be suggested that he opens Alcmene's eyes to the conventions of marriage that influence the codification of love and intimacy – while it is exactly the unknowing acceptance of the conventions of hospitality that allows the guest to be present in the household and to question the conventions. In his last major work, the German system theorist Niklas Luhmann distinguished between the functions associated with marriage as an institution and love that both guarantees and rests on it. For Luhmann, love is not a sensation or a general humanitarian idea – like the codified love of the guest in some European languages, as in the case of the German *Gastfreundlichkeit* or the Hungarian *vendégszeretet* – but a conditional feeling insofar as it is limited to one or more persons, i.e., the family, which in itself can constitute a kind of society and provide stability (Luhmann 1998, 23–4). According to Luhmann, loyalty, fidelity, and stability become the foundational elements of a society as soon as love, marriage, and sexuality are institutionally intertwined (30), and Jupiter's tour de force against Alcmene may be regarded as an attempt to draw her attention to this – and to the dynamics of the public and the private. After announcing their union in public, the married couple usually sets clear boundaries for what they only share in their privacy (40). In contrast to the comrades of Amphitryon, who believe they have the right to gain full insight into the couple's affairs, Jupiter, an immortal

deity, propagates privacy and evokes the fact that Alcmene and Amphitryon ended up together because of fate – a myth well-known to all recipients of the play – and not because of economics or mutual gratification (cf. 39).

In contrast to Jupiter, Amphitryon arrives home as a guest after listening to Sosias's story, in which no human sense (*Menschensinn*) can be found for the latter's duplicity: it is a story about an "I" that has been taken hostage: the new "I," the double that has taken over his identity, has conquered the gates and given him his own inscription in the form of a beating (i.e., the marks on Sosias's back [Kleist 1962, 26]). And when Amphitryon finally sees Alcmene again, she evokes the discourse of debt (30),[4] of *die Schuld* that also means 'sin' in German, by which she unknowingly tells him that she might have sinned – which she, also unknowingly, did. Still, what she is trying to find out is how she dishonored her husband, which is different from the unknown infidelity, and the two aspects are only synthesized by the recipients of the play on the outside – beyond the confines of the household, the theater stage. While Alcmene searches for witnesses – it is no coincidence that Jupiter dismissed all the servants before he "conquered" Alcmene (16) – Amphitryon makes her recount "his" stay in the castle (33, *Aufenthalt im Schloss* in the original) and not at home (*zu Hause*).

In their dissonance, Alcmene is willing to take back her marital vows, which is the exact opposite of being taken up on her promise, the debt to her husband. Coincidentally, Jupiter's sovereignty consists in his ability to release someone from their vow or promise (46, *ent*schuld*igt*, 'to owe someone an apology, to pardon, to forgive one's debt'), so his power is not productive in the sense that it would generate anything new, but rather he exercises the power to take away something; one's debt, or his position as a host when Amphitryon is "deamphitryonized" (73, *entamphitryonisiert*) by him. His eternal right to cancel the debt also raises the question of whether it is the host who can do this, or whether the guest can release the host from further hospitality. This also applies to Jupiter's ambiguous discourse, which aims to absolve Alcmene from the conventions of marriage, about which she would have to decide unwittingly whether or not to accept these words as coming from her husband, a situation that is repeated in public when she has to identify her real husband. Thus, the rupture between the direct sense of mortals and the completely different set of values imposed on them by the gods becomes central to the event of hospitality in the play as a staging of dichotomies such as the private and the

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[4] It is worth noting that according to the original myth, Alcmene's giving herself to Amphitryon would have already counted as a transaction: her virginity in exchange for avenging her brothers' death – hence the discourse of debt paid in full.

public, the mythical and the conventional, and so on. If Alcmene were to abide by the law, she would be faced with a choice between the law and love: she thinks of Amphitryon in front of the statue of Jupiter (41–2), the one that represents the founder and executor of divine law, but her agency, given her feelings, is provided by military officials, the enforcers of mortal law.

5. Conclusion

On the level of mortals, the decision about hospitality is accompanied by a series of paradoxes that cannot be conceived rationally – they lack "human sense" (*Menschensinn*) – and threaten the characters with the loss of their identity. Sosias tries to evade this by enacting various institutional forms, for example by first offering a truce (12) and then an alliance to his double (69), asking him to tolerate him in brotherly love. When Derrida – again alluding to Schmitt – speaks of the enemy in the form of the brother, he also draws attention to the fact that the enemy always brings with it the question of the *I* and the *me*: it addresses the one who regards another as the enemy, which leads to the question of who the enemy is *for me*, who my greatest enemy is. Is the enemy regarded as an enemy because the enemy threatens the *I* in various ways, including the case where I am the greatest enemy of myself (Derrida 2005, 162–3)? If so, Derrida rightfully points to the fact that one of the greatest enemies *of* and *in* Western thought is the obsession with the *I*.

It is quite telling that (the deamphitryonized) Amphitryon can only be a host again after recognizing Jupiter as the master of the house, since his recognition guarantees Jupiter's indebtedness to him as a guest. Yet Jupiter's demand to be recognized as the host in order to retroactively enact himself being hosted as the guest, mirrors the way in which it was originally a divine invitation that served as a perquisite of hospitality. His is, however, a reconstructive gesture, not unlike the iteration of the decision that was made unconsciously *out of* and *about* the unknown in order for hospitality to take place. Conventionality is always only the aftereffect of this original call, the invitation that comes from the "unknown" of hospitality as an open secret. The mortal can be called and invited, but he must decide whether to accept or decline the invitation, to whom it should be extended, and who should be identified as the one who invites. Therefore, invitation as such is always the bridging of a gap, not only between host and guest, but between mortals and immortals. And even if in Kleist's play there is an unknown clash between the divine law (gift) and the earthly one (fidelity), it is the invitation that makes such differentiations possible,

having already merged the two realms. All the violence inherent in the hostility of hospitality, be it the threatening anonymity of the stranger or their trick of posing as the host, is also violated by the reconstruction of a primordial invitation – the so-called "ought to come" in Derrida's work – which differs from the recognition of violence based on the right of the guest, that is, to take someone up on their promise, the duty of the guest in relation to the host. Jupiter's commitment *to* and *with* invitation is a promise that does not produce a referential surplus like oaths taken by mortals: Alcmene says she is ready to return her oath, while Sosias is held hostage by an oath and tries to escape it through contracts. These are cases of economizations, transactions centered on the preservation of the *I* in the household, from which the immortal deities try to free the mortal characters of the play. After all, as Jacques Lacan so thoughtfully observed, "Greek myths aren't ego-based" (Lacan 1991, 264).

Being pardoned is being liberated from the *I* that can be one's greatest enemy. To achieve this, one needs to recognize the conventions of hospitality as an open secret, never fully revealed or articulated, but practiced indirectly when hosting the one who is pretending to be the host, in this way violating the conventional dichotomy of the host and the guest. Challenging the rules of the household (*oikos*) by exploiting misrecognition means the end of treating promises, decisions, debts, and invitations in the context of economics and transactions – Jupiter's divine gift in the form of a demigod for the hospitality he received in Amphitryon's household is not a *quid pro quo*. It is but the result of unconditional hospitality, in which the *hôte* expects nothing in return, and since the whole event is based on misrecognition, neither host nor guest can be held to a particular meaning of their given word. Therefore, to be deamphitryonized is to be released (*entamphitryonisiert* is also *entschuldigt*) from a conventional role, which opens up the possibility of letting oneself be invited.

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The Derridean (Un)hostility of Fashion
Thinking Fashion Through Deconstruction

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Abstract

"There is, to all appearances, a philosophic hostility to fashionable dress" – writes Karen Hanson in "Dressing Down Dressing Up: The Philosophic Fear of Fashion". Hanson's study identifies several points – from the ever-changing nature of fashion to the ethicality of the fashion industry – from which philosophy has historically criticized and continues to criticize fashion as a social phenomenon, industry, and art form. In this sense, deconstruction indicates new critical design practice and (self-)critique of the fashion industry. The notion of "hostility" in the vocabulary of deconstruction and psychoanalysis is identical to the event of resistance. It is thus a genuinely defining feature. At the same time, its self-positioning consists of the creation and reception opened up by the object. Its developers (Freud, Derrida, de Man) recognized that in this "counter-feeling," or resistance, a new layer of interpretation and experience, previously only felt but not thought of, operates. Fashion's deconstructive processes exist in this resistance. There have been many attempts to link fashion research and the designers' conception of design to deconstruction. As Flavia Loscialpo already puts it this way: "Deconstruction fashion, which is always already in-deconstruction itself, involves, in fact, a thorough consideration of fashion's debt to its own history, to critical thought, to temporality and the modern condition." In my paper, I will make some arguments from the side of deconstruction concerning fashion in general, but also try to describe the nature of a postmodern "fashion process" (including the design thinking, the materiality of clothing or textiles, and even the theoretical perception of fashion). Through the writings of Derrida and Freud, I examine the critical fashion practices of Martin Margiela.

Keywords

Deconstruction, hostility, fashion theory, deconstruction fashion, Maison Martin Margiela, Derrida

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"There is, to all appearances, a philosophical hostility to fashionable dress" (Hanson 1990, 107) – writes Karen Hanson in "Dressing Down Dressing Up – The Philosophic Fear of Fashion". From the ever-changing nature of fashion to the ethicality of the fashion industry, Hanson's paper identifies several points from which philosophy has historically criticized and continues to criticize fashion as a social phenomenon, industry, and art form. In this paper, I will make arguments about fashion in general from the point of view of deconstruction and describe the nature of the radical postmodern "fashion process" (including the designer's deconstructive thinking, the deconstructive materiality of clothing or textiles, and even the theoretical perception of fashion). In this sense, deconstruction indicates the specific performative character of the fashion process, a new critical design practice, and a (self-)critique of the fashion industry. Therefore, the deconstructive direction of fashion theory and fashion design conceives of the above hostility as an integral and performative essence of the contemporary fashion process. The notion of "hostility" in the vocabulary of deconstruction and psychoanalysis is identical to the event of resistance. It is thus a truly defining feature of both ways of thinking, the recognition of the "object" and the series of events, processes, and at the same time, its self-positioning, consisting of the creation and reception opened up by the object. Its theorists (Sigmund Freud, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man) recognized that in this "hostility", or resistance, a new layer of interpretation and experience, previously felt but not formulated, operates. The existence and deconstructive process in fashion consist of analyzing and understanding this resistance.

According to Freud's definition of resistance, it is a reaction that protects against access to, and the manifestation of, the unconscious. This is exactly what can be observed in all components of the fashion process: in the fashion object, in the activity of the fashion designer, and the reactions of the receiver/viewer. Deconstruction has shown that all these acts take place in the context of the operation of resistance, as negative actions and negative performative acts. The psychoanalyst is not primarily interested in the breaking of resistance (and the constative grasping of "truth") but in analyzing the internal nature of resistance so that the act of resistance is a valuable message, a characteristic articulation of the world of the unconscious. For meaning does not reside in the unconscious but is projected in the stories and images – essentially rhetorical in nature – built upon it and reflected back from it. Resistance is a kind of performative speculum, a reflection, and its existence cannot

be judged objectively, since resistance never defines itself as resistance but as a self-validated system of relations, as truth.

In November 1991, Derrida presented his paper, later entitled "Resistances" (in the volume titled *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*), at a conference on *The Notion of Analysis*. In it, he is concerned not with Freud's notion of resistance, but with how Freud himself, in the *Irma dream*, operates his analytic activity as a kind of resistance. The essence of Freud's gesture is that he translates his own dream, the *Irma dream*. He states that the dream in question can be deciphered and serves to fulfill a particular desire. The deconstructive, resistance-encased processes of fashion contain a political character and its deconstruction.

1. Deconstruction as a thought experiment on fashion

There have been many attempts to link fashion research and designers' ideas about design to deconstruction as a way of thinking. As Elisabeth Wilson points out, "deconstruction fashion (or '*mode destroy*' as it was sometimes called), [is] a more intellectual approach, which literally unpicked fashion, exposing its operations, its relation to the body, and at the same time to the structures and discourses of fashion." (Wilson 1985, 250) Flavia Loscialpo concludes: "Deconstruction fashion, which is always already in-deconstruction itself, involves, in fact, a thorough consideration of fashion's debt to its own history, to critical thought, to temporality and the modern condition." (Loscialpo 2011, 17)

The role of deconstruction is to question the authoritarian foundations on which these structures are based and to open up new possibilities in signification and representation. It is not a methodology, nor a form of analysis, nor even a critique in the traditional sense:

> Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity. It deconstructs itself. It can be deconstructed. [Ça se deconstruit.] The "it" [ça] is not here an impersonal thing that is opposed to some egological subjectivity. It is in deconstruction (the Littré says, "to deconstruct itself [se deconstruire]... to lose its construction"). (Derrida 1988, 4)

Deconstruction is, therefore, rather an activity, a close reading of the text (the garment, the fashion) that shows that the text is not a single whole, and that it may always have several interpretations, which very often contradict each other.

Deconstructive reading (close reading) is manifested in the questioning and rethinking of contradictory concepts such as subject-object, nature-culture, presence-absence, and inside-outside, all of which are elements of a metaphysical hierarchy at the conceptual level.

The ideas conveyed by deconstruction have had a major impact on literature, architecture, new media, film theory, and the practical and theoretical fields of fashion design. Fashion theorist Flavia Loscialpo's "Fashion and Philosophical Deconstruction: A Fashion in-Deconstruction" also argues that Derrida's influence on the aforementioned fields and aesthetics is significant. She cites *The Truth in Painting* (1981), *Memoires of the Blind* (1990) and *La connaissance des textes* (2001) as Derrida's most significant texts in terms of fashion. Over the decades, then, a fruitful dialogue has been established between deconstruction and the many different fields of art.

2. Deconstructive fashion: reinterpreting material and structure

In *Thinking Through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists* (2019, edited by Agnés Rocamora and Anneke Smelik), fashion theorists explore possible interfaces between philosophy and fashion theory. Alison Gill's essay, after introducing the main terms of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and *Positions* as an introduction, goes on to reflect on Maison Martin Margiela's creative work from the perspective of the possible tools of deconstruction, most notably authorship, textuality, signature, temporality, and the trace. She notes that although Derrida never wrote about the phenomenon of fashion in general, there is a possible link to the subject in *Positions:*

> Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each "element" – phoneme or grapheme – being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (Derrida 1982, 26)

Drawing on Derrida, Sawchuk starts her argument about fashion from the following:

> The fashioned body is an embodied subjectivity, constituted in the rich weave of social, historical and cultural inscriptions. At any one time, or historical

juncture, the fashioned body is potentially located in multiple discourses on health, beauty, morality, sexuality, the nation, and the economy, to name some of the possibilities. (Sawchuk 2007, 478)

It should be noted that the ephemeral nature of fashion, which is also a cornerstone of Sawchuk's argument, was already prominent in the fashion philosophy of Barbara Vinken, who referred to fashion as "the realm of impermanence." (Vinken 2005) In Vinken's sense, fashion's time is not eternity, but the moment.

However, in the Resistance lecture, there is a line of thought by Derrida that any fashion scholar or philosopher has yet to refer to date. Derrida returns to Freud's idea of the topos of the "navel." Derrida (following Freud) understands the body as a tissue, a texture, defined primarily as a knot, a tangle:

What forever exceeds the analysis of the dream is indeed a knot that cannot be untied, a thread that, even if it is cut, like an umbilical cord, nevertheless remains forever knotted, right on the body, at the place of the navel. (Derrida 1998, 11)

According to Derrida, the navel is also a kind of remnant (a trace, a resistance) that resists. It is resistance as such, in the body and in the person. Derrida's next (post-Freudian) step in understanding this complex of tissue, web, body is to recall that towards the end of *The Interpretation of Dreams* we encounter again the notions of the navel, the thread and the texture:

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at the point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. [Cf. p. 135 n.] The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium. (Freud 1995, 528)

This thread, this tissue of unanalysable, unresolvable resistance, is the navel of the dream, which is not mapped by the interpretation of the dream, by the act of analysis, of reading, but is reacted to through the articulation of the dream desire as meaning.

The myriad design practices and experimental forms of deconstructive fashion can be linked to the Derridian-Freudian textual history, as when the fashion object, the garment, does not become part of the performance in its perfectly executed appearance, but on the contrary becomes a means of performative resistance against the constative presentation. Hussein Chalayan has created a dress elevated into a history of *abjection*. For the 1994 Cartesia fashion show, he made a special dress that he had previously buried and sprinkled with iron dust. After digging it up, he felt the dress took on a life of its own. It became part of the archaeology of the future. Rotting in the ground, the dress thus escapes from its own fashion-industrial truth and is placed in a performative event. The dress is no longer seen as a thing-like garment but becomes body-like; with time and age, it enters into negative performativity. It shows what people resist: it refers to death and passing. Bacteria impose organic processes on it.

3. Deconstructive fashion, post-fashion, anti-fashion

The year 1981 is considered a turning point in fashion history, as it was the year when Yamamoto and Kawakubo presented for the first time their own rather puritanical collection at Paris Fashion Week, at several points going against the fashion industry's then-classic fashion products. The designers redefined structure and the notions of quality associated with fashion products. These two collections encouraged the fashion press to reflect on the glamour surrounding fashion products. Loscialpo writes of this era:

> "Deconstructivist" designers questioned the traditional understanding of the invisible and the just unseen, thus subverting the parameters determining what is high and low in fashion. The designers seemed to make a powerful statement of resistance. At first, the austere, demure, often second hand look of their creations induced some journalists to describe it as "post-punk," or "grunge." (Loscialpo 2011, 16)

Almost a decade later, in July 1993, an article on "deconstructivist fashion" appeared in the *New York Times*, to clarify the new movement's origins and orientation. The press began to pay more attention to the work of Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto. In an essay published in the journal *Fashion Theory* in 1998, Alison Gill argues:

The term: "deconstruction fashion" used to describe garments on a runway that are "unfinished," "coming apart," "recycled," "transparent" or "grunge." ... As a literal *dismantling* of clothes and embodiment of aestheticized *non-functionality*, that deconstruction "in fashion" amounts to an anti-fashion statement (a wilful avant-garde desire to destroy "Fashion") or an expression of nihilism (i.e., absence of belief). It would be worthwhile to consider the parallels this style has with the influential French style of philosophical thought, deconstruction, associated with the writings of Jacques Derrida, and in doing so, to re-visit its announcement in fashion and other design fields where the term deconstruction circulates. (Gill 1998, 25-26)

Gill therefore emphasises that the fashion press reduces deconstructive fashion and interprets it solely in the context of the material. It ignores the criticism of the fashion industry that lies behind it and is inherently ever-present. In a sense, however, deconstructive fashion is often associated with the term "anti-fashion". In 1993, even the curatorial duo Harold Koda and Richard Martin described deconstructive fashion as "the new trend of the 1990s." (Koda – Martin 1993)

Most fashion history writings consider Rei Kawakubo's 1978 collection for *Commes des Garçons* as an essential reference point in the context and perspective of deconstructive fashion. Her clothes were simple (monochrome), timeless, and flawed looking. The knitted dresses were perforated, the fabric distorted and ragged, the shapes non-conformist and they were a complete counterpoint to the trendy, glittery and sexually radiant dresses of the 1980s. Martin Margiela also rebelled against the creativity of the fashion industry, reworking old clothes and their most varied fabrics for his 1989 Paris fashion show. It was not only the clothes that were "unconventional" in the traditional sense, but also the mannequins and the catwalk space. The faces of her models were deliberately pale.

The terms "anti-fashion," "post-fashion," or "postmodern fashion" are often applied to deconstructivist fashion in fashion history writings. Deconstructive design is frequently associated with the "death of fashion," and the term "la mode Destroy" is also used. Barbara Vinken dates the emergence of post-fashion to the 1980s: "Fashion gains a new lease of life. This is what I would like to refer to as postfashion." (Vinken 2005, 5) She continues:

The Paris show of Comme des Garçons, in 1981, spectacularly marked the end of one era ... it deconstructs modernity and, in the end, leaves it behind. If, for a hundred years, fashion has invented and reinvented "woman," postfashion

has begun to deconstruct this "woman." Where fashion used to disguise its art, it now exhibits its artificiality. In the sign of the old, the used, it prescribes itself an aesthetic of poverty and ugliness, of sentimentality and out-modedness, of kitsch and bad taste, in which elements of the petit bourgeois enter into competition with the outsiders of society. (Vinken 2005, 35-36)

4. Deconstructive fashion as a self-critique of the fashion industry

In her comprehensive study, Alison Gill notes that, apart from Olivier Zahm's responses, many scholars have assumed that deconstructive fashion as a movement is nothing more than another example of avant-gardism and the avant-garde's desire to destroy. (Gill 1998, 32) To support Zahm's argument that the linking of dressing and deconstruction is about more than a desire to destroy functionality, Gill develops four possible interpretations of deconstructive fashion from the concepts of "Anti-Fashion," "Recession Zeitgeist," "Eco-Fashion," and "Theoretical Dress." Gill also suggests that even deconstructive fashion could easily find a place in the discourse of Anti-Fashion, since, like the history of Anti-Fashion, deconstructive fashion is characterised by a rejection of high fashion by designers who expect couture to have no connection with "street wear" or "night club style." (Gill 1998, 32) Anti-fashion/anti-design (such as Westwood, Gaultier, etc.) is also closely linked to political resistance, which is not characteristic of deconstructive fashion to this extent. In Gill's interpretation, the question of whether or not deconstructive fashion is "Anti-Fashion" is closely related to whether or not the "fashion created by the designer takes up the oppositional terms of a negative critique, as the term anti-fashion clearly signifies, with the additional tones of playfulness, provocation, and parody frequently used." (Gill 1998, 33) Fashion and literary theorist Jolán Orbán also points out that "Anti-Fashion is a performative self-contradiction, as Rei Kawakubo or Martin Margiela question fashion through the means of fashion, creating a fashion that is fashionable." (Orbán 2020) Flavia Loscialpo makes the same argument:

When, in the early 1980s, a new generation of independent thinking designers made its appearance on the fashion scenario, it seemed to incarnate a sort of "distress" in comparison to the fashion of the times. Influenced by the minimalism of their own art and culture, designers Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto, Issey Miyake and, later in the decade, the Belgian Martin Margiela

pioneered what can legitimately be considered a fashion revolution. By the practicing of deconstructions, such designers have disinterred the mechanics of the dress structure and, with them, the mechanisms of fascinations that haunt fashion. The disruptive force of their works resided not only in their undoing the structure of a specific garment, in renouncing to finish, in working through subtractions or displacements, but also, and above all, in rethinking the function and the meaning of the garment itself. With this, they inaugurated a fertile reflection questioning the relationship between the body and the garment, as well as the concept of "body" itself. (Loscialpo 2011, 13)

5. Presence and absence: the fashion-trace

The trace follows from the Derridean term *différance*, which proclaims the "happening" of the text and the hidden, writing-level distributive production of differences in meaning. For Derrida, the trace is the difference, the disappeared origin of the *différance*. Alison Gill embeds the Derridean notion of trace in the discourse of sewing and tailoring in the practice of fashion design. In this sense, a trace would be what the designer's hand applies to the textile with the dressmaker's pencil, which refers directly to the working process and to traditional dressmaking techniques. Gill also notes that in the case of postmodern fashion, these traces are "on the outside of deconstructed garments: one can make out lining, seams, darts, shoulder pads, white basting thread, patterns. These traces of the labour would normally be effaced or magically concealed in a finished product, until exposed seams, amongst other elements, changed the game." (Gill 2016, 258)

As Derrida puts it: the trace is the effaced origin of difference, "the opening of … the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside." (Derrida 1976, 70) Alison Gill argues through Derrida's text:

The related notion of the "seam" in garment construction is highly suggestive as a productive third term, an undecidable, that has the potential to give further insight. In simple terms, the seam is a trace of garment production that cannot be fully concealed: more interestingly, it functions as a hinge, interface, and borderline between two pieces. It is both essential to structure and overall garment shape, and it resides on the surface and below. The seam is an interface holding the inside and the outside, depth and surface together, that can take us to both sides when "double-thought." (Gill 2016, 258)

Gill's examples are Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto. Taking Derrida's quote above as a starting point, the trace also refers to historical antecedence, acting as a palimpsest. It is that the trace triggers "interplay between presence and absence, including elements of fashion history and the signature motifs of past designers, that are neither fully absent nor present ... which operate as palimpsest entails an effacement of the trace of fashion history." (Gill 2016, 259) The fashion experiment can find a way to make traces of the past transparently visible. Alison Gill seeks to illustrate this through the work of Martin Margiela, who in the 1990s was already rejecting the tabula rasa nature of the fashion product and attempting an "analysis of the construction" (Gill 2016, 264).

6. Fashion as Zeitgeist

Fashion, art, and consumer culture are all concepts that deconstructive fashion designers have critiqued, questioning their relation to time. As Barbara Vinken argues, fashion is nothing more than the *Zeitgeist*, an expression of the cultural reflection of the times. At the same time, the fashion industry is permeated by a specific *Zeitgeist*, which is nothing other than cyclicality: it must constantly change and reinvent itself from season to season. Deconstructive designers are questioning the need for this, and its direction. This constant dialogue with the past allows Yamamoto, Kawakubo, Margiela, and others to ensure that deconstructive fashion is not dictated by any particular fashion trend provoked by consumer culture and capitalism. Deconstructive fashion "does not simply aim at replacing the old fashion parameters it tries to dismantle with new ones. What it does, in fact, is working for disclosing and showing 'other' possibilities." (Loscialpo 2011, 20)

In this sense, deconstructive fashion can be understood as a critique of formalism, a response to its crisis. However, in Alison Gill's interpretation, deconstructive fashion is also linked to the phenomenon of "eco-fashion." While the spirit of the times in which Margiela created the collections mentioned above was not particularly affected by the issue of sustainability (although the potential problem of sustainability was already a theme in some professional circles), Margiela was already concerned with these issues, which in turn are now also defining the spirit of our times. Margiela seems to have "predicted" what the cloak of the *Zeitgeist* of the next age might conceal. "Deconstruction fashion seems then to dwell in a place that is neither inside nor outside the fashion scenario, but stands always already on edge or, in Derridean words, *'au bord.'*" (Loscialpo 2011, 22)

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General Section

The Mouth and the Tongue – or the Dictator and the Dentist

The Head and its Parts as Figures in Andrea Tompa's Prose

Csilla Bonifertné Bodroghi[1]

Abstract

In this paper I attempt to give a reading of Andrea Tompa's two novels by examining one chosen chapter from each work, hoping that the investigation will provide insights into the work as a whole. I will approach the text through close reading and examine the poetic and semantic role of the body parts that appear in the text. In *The Hangman's House*, the focus will be on the mise en abyme and we will have a better understanding of the metaphoric process. In *Home*, an essayistic travel novel, the interplay of literal and metaphorical meanings and the question of allegory will be raised. The contrast between medical themes and an artistic approach reveals the relationship between language and home, and the strangeness inherent in that which is one's "own".

Keywords

Body parts, embodied experience, metaphor, language, home, mother tongue, dictatorship

"The senses of proximity are the skin, the ears, the tongue and the nose - the gaze alone is capable of the act of objectification and idealisation: of distancing and organising the simultaneous order of things. The critic uses all his senses, so to speak, simultaneously: his judgments of true and false, beauty and ugliness, are based on the dynamics of proximity and distance."

(Sarolta Deczki, *Praise of Sensuality*)

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In this paper,[2] I would like to show the prose-poetic role of parts of the head in Andrea Tompa's prose. I examined all five of her published novels from this point of view. It is interesting to note that in each of them there is a part of the body that is of central importance. (Of course, this emphasis on my part does not mean that only one sense organ appears in a work.) This narrow interpretative framework offers the possibility of seeing Andrea Tompa's oeuvre as a unified whole, insofar as a face is formed by mouth, head, ear, tongue, and eye; this may be a confluence of interpretative arbitrariness and chance, but it may lead to important insights. The validity and raison d'être of this viewpoint is due, first, to the recent prominence of various body poetics and corporeal narratology approaches in literary studies, and second, to the increasing prominence of embodied mind theory (Varela, F. J., Thompson, E., Rosch, E., 1991) in philosophical, psychological, and linguistic studies since the 1990s. Linguistic cognitive metaphor theory, understood on the basis of the embodied mind, is also relevant to this study (Kövecses 2005, 32). On the other hand, in the past few years, such hybrid fields of research as *medical humanities* have been continuously gaining ground within cultural studies.[3] Daniel Punday's theory laid the foundations for corporeal narratology, one of the novelties of which is that it incorporates referential readings of the body into the creation of meaning.[4]

Here I focus on two works, specifically her first and fourth novels, because these two works exist in an English translation. In *The Hangman's House* (*A hóhér háza*, first Hungarian edition 2010) I explore the mouth, and in *Home* (*Haza,* first Hungarian edition 2020) the tongue. I am also looking for answers to the question of the relationship between body parts and text, how they participate in meaning making, and whether we are dealing with metaphorization and allegory. We will see that the starting point is a concrete narrative unit, and from this we will derive multiple meanings throughout the text. An oscillation between literal and metaphorical meanings seems to be the author's trademark. This exploration appears to support the argument concerning Tompa's whole oeuvre that embodied experience, different modes of perception, and sensory language are prominent features in this prose.

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[2] This paper is an extract from the extended and further developed version of my lecture for the conference on *Poetics and Semantics of Literary Representations of the Head and its Parts* held on 13 January 2024 at Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest. In this lecture I studied all five of Tompa's novels and in each the role of a part of the head: in *Top to Tail. Two Doctors in Transylvania* I examined the figure of the head, in *Omertà* the ear as a subtext in the Riffaterrian sense, and in her recent work *Often We Don't Die*, the figure of the eye. The role of the body is most prominent in *Top to tail*, where the body is a code that provides a way of approaching the whole emancipatory era represented. The study of the five novels (with the two others studied here) puts together a whole image of a face (mouth, head, ears, tongue, eyes) as, in a sense, a metaphor of Tompa's oeuvre.

[3] E.g. *Helikon*'s special issue on *Medical Humanities,* Volume 68, no 1, 2022.

[4] Györgyi Földes speaks about Punday's theory: "He argues that although the body always fits into a sign system, it also points beyond the text, preserves cultural and thematic influences, points to its sociological and anthropological frames, and is influenced to some extent by the personality of the author." (Földes 2018, 27)

1. The dictator's mouth

Andrea Tompa's first novel is *The Hangman's House*, published in 2010, the most analyzed chapter of which is entitled "The Mouth". This chapter is the third in a novel of 38 loosely linked chapters, in which schoolchildren assemble a living image of the dictator's face at the behest of a teacher. It is also a key chapter, since, according to Júlia Szilágyi, it contains the key sentence of the novel, which suggests that the hangman's house is only a fiction. Perhaps this is the most analysed chapter of the novel because it is easy to extract from the text and it offers an easily interpretable metaphor or at least it seems to be an easily interpretable one. According to one interpretation, the power of the metaphor is related to its comprehensibility, namely that it is easily understood by the recipient: "Andrea Tompa's novel has the great merit of making this reality comprehensible to everyone without any embellishment, with this powerful metaphor." (Szilágyi 2010, 83)

Most critics and academics interpret it as a metaphor of the communist regime, showing how dictatorship works through a cult of personality. Éva Bányai emphasizes that the totalitarian system is inscribed on the body,[5] Flóra Kovács assumes the creation of the tableau as one of the "incorporation techniques of the regime" (Kovács 2011, 15) and attributes its description to the author's intention to illustrate it. In my opinion, if this were the case, namely that the author only wanted to illustrate something with this scene, it would detract from its aesthetic value. Kovács calls this image "redundant, but at the same time inventive" (Kovács 2011, 15), where in the case of the first adjective it is not entirely clear what the critic means. Perhaps we might think that although it "does not carry new information", it "represents an additional element in communication that facilitates reception" (Kovács 2011, 15).

The characteristic and authorial decision that the protagonist of the novel, the girl, should represent the dictator's mouth, i.e. his speech organ and not any other part of his body, is read in different ways by critics and scholars. Kovács sees in this that the individual can only appear as the "mouthpiece" of the regime (Kovács 2011, 15), while Orsolya András understands her as the opposite, as a signifier of silencing, as the regime's "intention to silence" individuals. (András 2023, 224) As

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[5] "The Formation into image, the embodiment: the dictatorship-figure that emerges from the unconscious, but still *participating* bodies that consequently take *part* in it, is also a regime metaphor: they all form the dictatorship, the bodies are "constructing" it, which also raises the (memory) creating power of fiction: the existence of (fictional) doubles and the space of fear constructed by the image(s), just as the hangman's house was built by the memory to have something to fear." Bányai, Éva. 2016. *Fordulat-próza. Átmenetnarratívák a kortárs magyar irodalomban*. [Prose of the Turn: Transitional narratives in contemporary Hungarian literature]*,* Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület. 36-37.

Magdolna Balogh has pointed out: in the chapter "At the Tear Man", the girl learns that it is necessary to speak, that trauma can be dealt with by telling one's own story, though only silently" (Balogh 2023, 89). In this sense, the novel itself can be considered as subversive counter-speech (András 2023, 233) to this silencing intention, given that it is the story of the girl narrated by a third-person narrator.

The dictator's name is not written down once in the text. He is referred to as "One-ear" (*Félfülű*), because the side profile on his pictorial representations does not allow the viewer to see more than one ear. We have seen that this image of a face made up of bodies functions as a metaphor, but Szilágyi goes even further and speaks of "an image with symbolic power", that is, she understands the "tableau" as a symbol that is stronger than the metaphor, and one that affects the whole novel. Szilágyi, moreover, considers this chapter to be "one of the best resolved chapters of the novel." (Szilágyi, 2011)

This chapter, understood as a *mise en abyme*, can be a "small mirror" (diminishing mirror) of the whole novel, in so far as it seeks to show the "face" of a dictatorship from the bottom, from the point of view of an adolescent girl, told in an "undisclosed order" in successive chapters. The face, made up of ignorant children who do not know their roles as parts, visible only from above, can be juxtaposed with the text: is there a position or point of view that unites the pieces and makes them whole? Does the reader get a picture of the period, of the Ceaușescu dictatorship?

The chapter, which consists of a single long sentence, opens with this sentence in medias res: "*What part of him are you?*" (Tompa 2021b, 22, original italics) This follow-up conversation with classmate Csabi, waiting at the trolley-bus station, embeds the ekphrasis in a narrative framework and creates readerly expectations, since it is not yet known to which person and to which part the question refers. A conversation with a classmate awakens the girl to what has happened earlier. The ekphrastic text thus describes not only the image, but also the situation in which the girl runs away from the scene of the conversation, while becoming aware of her role in a living image.

Drawing on the analysis of Mónika Dánél, who interprets this text as an ekphrasis, reading it from the point of view of the relationship which exists between image and language (2018, 115), we can say that language is not transparent, as the text calls attention to its own linguistic composition which constructs itself as a speech. In this way, instead of using language to create an image of the photograph in the reader, whether known or not to the reader, self-referentiality becomes the primary concern, the rhythm of the text pulling the reader along. Language draws

attention to itself primarily through repetition. In the following passage, the lexeme of "pictures" is used three times in succession and a little later a fourth time, which gives particular emphasis to the figure of the leader as a fiction created by visuality:

> I am him, or more precisely we are all him, because we're all stood in nice, tidy order and we turn on the word of command and we're him: but he himself doesn't exist anywhere, nobody's ever seen him, never: Tátá's seen him and my uncle Pista as well, they've sat with him at meetings, but now *he's just pictures, pictures, pictures, not a person, just pictures* (Andrea Tompa, 2021, 28, my italics).

In the second quotation, the text employs enumeration and repetition as its main rhetorical tools:

> and they've become a picture, *mouth, hair, skin, eyes, floppy bow-tie and ears*, but they can't see it, can't hear anything, aren't looking at anything, saying *nothing, nothing, nothing*, If you turn to the left you become him at once, and now "left turn!", and they feel no pain in the January frost. (Andrea Tompa, 2021, 29, my italics)

Here the word *nothing* is repeated three times, as a signifier of silence (*saying nothing*). The image created in the dynamics of proximity and distance of subjects identified as parts is only assembled into a whole in the mind. We are witnessing the subject becoming an image through language, as here the gesture of silencing and later freezing becomes dominant in the final lines. The final phrase refers to this freezing, to the immobilized moment of becoming a picture: "in the January frost", the narrative voice concludes the chapter-long sentence. The repetition makes the language lyrical, the rhythm of the text accelerates towards the end of the chapter, which at once reveals the monotony of the live image, the repetition of the movement to the words of command and the subsequent running, the accelerating rhythm of the flight, the agitation, the negative emotions provoked by the girl's subsequent confrontation with the part of the body of the dictator she had to display: "*Now I'm his disgusting mouth*". The mouth here is not only an organ of speech, but also a 'sexual organ' in the sense that it can be understood in terms of sexuality since it is represented in a highly eroticized way in the text. The dictator's mouth, which does not utter slogans – it only "vomits" out letters without meaning – nevertheless begins to possess the adolescent girl sexually in her imagination, creating in her a feeling of disgust, first with physical contact and then with herself. The detail is full of adjectives (two and three adjective structures) and reinforces the disgust in the recipient by alliterations, repeating the initial sounds 'f' and 'h' (in Hungarian: "*fehér, fröcsögő betűket*" and "*hatalmas, habzó száj*"):

Now I'm his disgusting mouth, came suddenly into her head, and she felt sick as she thought of herself and the overalls that she'd not long taken off, she felt as if cold, drooling lips were kissing her defenceless body, as if this huge frothing mouth were vomiting white, foaming letters over her, and she was becoming a bit of living, loathsome, pink flesh, torn off and displayed to public view" (Tompa, 2021, 27)

In the English version the "f" is dominant (frothing, foaming) and the alliteration is given by the words "living, loathsome" and "were vomiting white".

The red dress that she has to wear takes on multiple meanings as the text progresses, first with the romanticizing description of the dictator – in which his mouth takes on feminine features – ("blood-red cherry lips"), blood as a colour, then the dress as a representation of the mouth, "blood-red overall", and then the mythology of the victim ("the transfusion of blood, the child's blood" for the demon to survive). These processes of metaphorization through transference provide the structural arc of the chapter: first we start with a post-situation and questioning ("What *part of him* are you?"), after that there is a misinterpretation ("Aren't we *letters?*"), a withholding of information and lack of information ("no one had officially told them *what* they were portraying"), a lack of self-reflection ("and so the girl hadn't thought about what the colours meant"), a recollection ("How many *reds* do you think there were?"), and a realization or recognition ("it has suddenly dawned on her that she could only be *his mouth*"). In the middle of the text it turns out that the reference of the picture is perhaps only a fiction ("*the tiny original of the picture* [...] He won't come because he doesn't exist"), the girl makes an identification ("Now I'm his disgusting *mouth*"). After that the problem is raised to community level ("we are all him") and finally comes mythologization ("it is I, I, I in *my blood-red overalls* that keep him alive" and "this blood transfusion, this *children's blood* which the demon receives every week to keep him alive"). (Tompa 2021b, 29, my emphasis)[6] Thus the chain of signifiers results in a continuous metaphorical shift: *part of him – letters –what – reds – blood-red cherry lips – his mouth – we are all him – blood-red overalls – children's blood*. The body becomes a sign, these signs are constantly open to interpretation, and are sometimes referred to as the signified, sometimes given meaning through multiple transpositions, whereby the children are represented as mythical victims, as unconscious upholders of the system.

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[6] Although the direct quotations and internal monologues are in italics in the text, I have written them in roman type to make the emphasis clear.

In many ways, it is interesting to compare this chapter with the one in György Dragomán's novel *The Bone Fire* (*Máglya*, first Hungarian edition 2014), in which the protagonist, Emma, finds the torn photograph of the dictator in the school's bathroom after the revolution. Emma continues to dismantle the pictures of the previously damaged wooden panels. Here, only pieces of the photograph remain and recall the whole image, while in *The Hangman's House* the whole gigantic picture is pieced together. In both cases, the contemplation and recollection of the image gives the characters insight into the system. In Dragomán's case, "everyone just lied" becomes a theoretical truth; in Andrea Tompa's case, the mode of operation is more complex, understood on several levels: the doubt in the existence of the dictator, the disappearance of the individual as subject, and more specifically, the Romanianization of the school. In the context of this parallel, Bányai points out that the scene recalled in *The Bone Fire* "becomes a system theory told in an accessible way, at a child's level." (Bányai 2016, 91)

An interesting similarity is that eroticism is also present here, because while Emma is looking at the One-Ear's mouth, the girls are talking about kissing in the toilet, the narration of which has textual similarities with Tompa's text quoted above:

> I don't want to listen but still I hear as they mention some boy who told everyone that he had been *kissing* someone, and it was real grown-up kissing, not only her cheek, but *her mouth* too; [...] Even in the semidarkness I recognize the curly hair of the Comrade General, *a piece of his earlobe, a piece remaining from his mouth* as well, the exact middle of *his lips*, the part that was always shiny; enough of the gold lettering remains for all the slogans and mottoes to complete themselves in my head.
> [...]
> I reach over to the wooden panel, and with the nails of my thumbs I begin to scratch off pieces of Comrade *General's lips, I feel the repulsion in my throat*, but even so I can't stop. (Dragomán, 2021, 64–65, My italics)

While Emma is the first-person narrator of her own story, Tompa's text uses a third-person narrative, but there is a striking similarity between the two novels in the language of the narrative based on the figure of congeries and the use of the coordinative clauses. The two simultaneous narratives are layered on top of each other: the narrated experience of the others' lovemaking and the protagonist's tactile perception of it, its aggressive, destructive nature (she scratches the pieces of the

mouth with her nails), and it is as if both simultaneously evoked a sense of disgust in her. The gesture of putting the pieces together is typical of the period when the system was in operation, as we have seen in the case of the dictator's picture, which served to maintain a cult of personality, and the period after the overthrow of the system is characterized by the disintegration of images and representations.

As historical context, it should be pointed out that the pictorial and sculptural representations of dictators served to maintain dictatorships and cults of personality in the communist countries of Eastern Europe, including Hungary. The destruction of these symbols was a quintessential act of rebellion against the regime. Such was the case with the destruction of the statue of Stalin during the 1956 revolution in Budapest. The picture of the statue's head between the rails in Blaha Lujza Square captures the iconic gesture of the destruction of the statue. For decades, pieces of the statue were hidden as secret, forbidden souvenirs. The ear was purchased by the Hungarian National Museum for half a million forints in 2009, with the help of a donor.

2. The writer's tongue and the B6

Home's protagonist is an unnamed writer who is headed for a class reunion in her hometown. An important theme of *Home* is to show the links between language and home. The first online review after the novel's publication in the UK also reflects this in its title: "The only liveable space is language: *Home* by Andrea Tompa." (Schreiber 2024) The problem of language is central in the narrative-reflexive structure, and one aspect of this is the relationship between language and home. If we subject the corpus to a machine text analysis and explore it in a quantitative manner, we find that the word *nyelv* (language, tongue) occurs 63 times in its root form, and if we count all other forms, including the subjunctive forms and word compounds, we can find 289 occurrences. By comparison, the most frequent occurrences of nouns are the phonemes "fiú" (boy) (156) and "festő" (painter) (111), which are primarily character names ("Fiú" in the English translation is the *Son*, and *Painter* is used for "Festő").[7]

The chapter "Tongue in Mouth", Chapter 15 in the 45-chapter novel, which tells the story of a visit to the dentist, may be a *mise en abyme* (small mirror) of this

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[7] This analysis is made with Voyant Tools program. http://www.voyant-tools.org/

language–home problem. This is the chapter which the author read in an interview,[8] and which was published first in English translation as *Tongue in Mouth* (Tompa 2021c) before the publication of the complete text. The text plays with the phonemic ambiguity of the Hungarian word *nyelv* ('1. language 2. tongue 3. style') using both the speech organ of the writer-protagonist and the dentist's medical style of speech (the use of the plural first person, which he adopts involuntarily): "It feels like new, and adopting *Dr. Rostam's style*, she adds, even though we haven't touched these teeth at all." (Tompa 2024, my italics) In the original text the word *nyelv* is used "Rostam doktor *nyelvé*t", an ambiguity that cannot be reproduced in English, and so the Hungarian word *nyelv* is translated as either *tongue* or *style*. This is why Jozefina Komporaly, in her one-sentence introduction to her translation, may speak of "the complex connections between teeth and home", and not between tongue and home, but on closer inspection, there are several different connections. Although it is true that the protagonist first complains to the dentist about the foreignness of her tongue, later on she also talks about grinding her teeth and fillings.

Elements of medical jargon are also incorporated into the text, representing the problem of the familiar and the foreign in multiple ways. For example, first of all the scientific name of the teeth (B6, B7, B8) are used, then "the back of the tongue" and the marked appropriation, i.e. "bridging" in quotation marks. The very title – *Tongue in Mouth* – sounds strange, since it is obvious where the tongue as an organ is located, but this clarification is also necessary because of the polysemy of the Hungarian word *nyelv,* and it can be the source of humour or irony as well. In the first sentence, the writer's own tongue is thematized as a foreign tongue: "So she's ready to discuss the issue of foreign tongues, or to put it differently, the issue of one's *own foreign* tongue in the mouth, with Dr. Rostam." (Tompa 2024, 133, my italics) In the opening of the sentence, the adjectival structure "foreign tongue" does not appear as the hitherto thematized "idiom spoken as a non-native language", although this would correspond to the reader's expectation.

The writer then complains that her tongue seems to have grown, and we are later informed that the teeth B6 or B7 feel as "if somehow they weren't really her own". During the reading, the writer is alienated from her own text:

> Her tongue, like a heavy inelastic block, is barely rolling, always smashing into either the B6 or the B7, or even the barely there yet still semiprotruding B8,

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[8] When she was interviewed, the author found it suitable and easy to pick out of the text and read it out: Andrea Tompa: Home, In conversation with the author László Valuska. https://www.margofeszt.hu/hu/fesztival/program/tompa-andrea-haza, (5:00 -11:18)

the latter seemingly displaying sharp edges despite Dr. Rostam's attempts at smoothing it at least six times with that slow but extremely loud drill. The text intended for reading out loud has become inaccessible in the course of the process, *despite consisting of her own sentences, woven together slowly and meticulously. She can no longer relate to it, and, what's more, the words pulverize like sawdust as soon as they are uttered and said out loud*." (Tompa 2024, 135 My italics)

Rebeka Seres draws attention to the fact that the feeling of nervousness arises in the process of utterance, in speech, which can be contrasted with the process of writing. "For the writer at the centre, it is also a problem when the writing becomes spoken word. [...] First she goes to the dentist with her problem, blaming it on the sharpness of his teeth, but eventually she realises that the problem is her struggle with language. And by pronouncing it, she alienates herself from what he has to say [...]." (Seres 2020, 29)

Then the parallel between the writer and Dr Rostam is established: the doctor, of Persian origin, who arrived in the country at the age of two, had to learn the correct way of articulating sounds (not through the nose but through the mouth), which he mastered perfectly. Strangeness must be disguised, in his interpretation – both the dentist and the writer seek to disguise it with perfection. In the novel, the writer herself disguises (and it is rarely unveiled) how painful it is for her still to be considered a stranger, an emigrant in her new homeland even if she did not have to change language.

If we allow ourselves an autobiographical and auto-referential parallel with the author herself, we may consider a quotation from a Facebook post by Andrea Tompa on 18 October 2019, in which she briefly explores the question of the emigrant writer: "I am increasingly preoccupied with the not at all theoretical question of until when we are considered immigrants and from when." She also stresses the problem of language, i.e. concepts and designations: "(If it seems that I am playing with words, then yes, I am. Words are dreadfully important.)" (Tompa 2019) This problem – namely her ambivalent relationship with her new home – certainly plays a role in the fact that the protagonist's mother tongue is never identified as Hungarian, nor is it stated that she lives in Hungary. Furthermore, the author wants to present the subject as universal. The fiction continues in this direction and explores this ambivalent status in the next chapter, entitled "I'm Not an Émigré". The mouth hides the tongue, but it cannot be hidden at the dentist's. The question "So where do you come from?" (Tompa 2024, 139) sounds painfully at the end of the chapter, and presumably the amalgam fillings have unmasked the writer. This

chapter speaks of the writer's persistent sense of alienation in her own country. It can also be interpreted as an allegory of the strangeness that is to be concealed, but is repeatedly revealed, and an allegory of the *stranger in the familiar*. The theory of *transculturalism* can be brought into the interpretation here, in which the concept of transfer is particularly suited to this problem.

> The concept of transfer can be understood as a voyage of discovery of the foundations of cultural dynamics, with the aim of discovering the *alien in the self*, the known in the alien. Josip Užarević, quoting Descartes, transforms cogito ergo sum into transfero ergo sum, calling for a new exploration of cultural transfer." (Thomka, 2018, 40 My italics)

In the context of the whole novel, the problem of the alienation of the self is part of the process of the writer's search for her mother tongue, of her writing, and in order to do this, she must alienate herself from her mother tongue. In contemporary literary studies, questions of switching languages and the relationship of translingual writers to language have become increasingly important. Akira Mizubayashi, a Japanese writer who has published in French, said: "La première qualité d'un écrivain est d'être étranger à sa propre langue." (A writer's greatest virtue is his ability to be alienated from his own language). (Darfeuille, 2014) In this sense, the novel's protagonist is also trying to renew herself as a writer by distancing herself from her mother tongue. Translation is one way of moving away from the mother tongue, as when the writer is forced to think in English[9] in a conversation with an American girl, Kincső on her way to a class reunion. We also see this in the question of the translation of *salvation* (üdvösség) and the reflections on it.

According to another, similar approach, writing is not based on the habitual use of the mother tongue, but on the creation of a new language, a poetic language, one might say. One language-shifting Bosnian-German author considers it so:

> For me, writing itself is a *foreign language*. For every story, for every play, for every new creation, I have to learn a new language: I have to find the narrator's voice, I have to decide on my figure's specific verbal characteristics, and I have to learn and keep the rhythm and flow of the whole. [...] A *language* is the only *country without borders*. Writers, indeed anyone, can (and should) use the privilege to make a language bigger, better, and more beautiful by planting a wordtree here or there, one never grown before." (Stanišić 2008, My italics)

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[9] The writer can express herself better in English when talking about intimate or painful topics, as in the case of her presentation for the conference "Guest in your country": "Fortunately, the talk will be in English. It's reassuring to avoid the traps of one's mother tongue, with its exceedingly complicated twists and endless ramifications. Instead, there's an opportunity to proceed in English, as if navigating a safer and less busy dual carriageway, where things can be named a lot easier because they already have names in foreign languages. No need to be afraid, foreignness is a safe shield." (Tompa 2024, 8)

This kind of literary ingenuity and Tompa's individual word creations are particularly well exemplified in *Home*, for instance in "*hazabetegség*" a literal translation of "homesickness", "*hazaszerelem*" (homelove), "*emberszomj*" (thirst for human), "*szóhámozás*" (peeling back of words), and so on.

This linguistic strangeness is heightened by the fact that, on the one hand, a Russian phrase in italics, printed in Cyrillic letters, is wedged into the text, which at the same time testifies to a positive emotional attitude:

> In this time-gap, where, using her favourite Russian phrase, there was от нечего делать, and, as a result, she was overwhelmed with inertia, she could have had them replaced indeed, even if not with sparkling white but with the recommended shade 2 composite filling, in lieu of the old gray metal mixture, of mercury and another metal, perhaps silver." (Tompa 2024, 136)

Quotations in Russian and French are often literary quotations while English ones represent an everyday communication tool. The phrase "от нечего делать" ("nothing to do") is clearly a reference to Anton Chekhov, since this concept is at the centre of his poetics.[10] He also wrote a short story with this title ("Nothing to be done!", 1886), and it is of course also found in his drama, *The Three Sisters*. In the second act, Andrey says to Ferapont: "Today, *out of sheer boredom*, I took up this book—old university lectures, and I couldn't help laughing." (Chekhov, 2022) This – the fact that it is her favourite phrase – cannot be a coincidence, since, if we look at autobiographical references, the author's work as a theatre critic and theatre scholar is well known.

Moreover there is a quotation in Hungarian translation from a Russian poet in exile, Joseph Brodsky, who, starting from a similar dental theme, bases his poem "In the Lake District" (or in another translation "At the edge of the Lake") on the contrast between the badly preserved yet valuable teeth and the teaching of rhetoric: "She would have had the opportunity to have her large, dark amalgam fillings replaced with pretty, white ones in two, maximum three appointments. *Wisdom tooth, for, Hiding in the mouth, / The ruins of the Parthenon cleaner,* as Joseph Brodsky writes, preoccupied, like all poets, with foreign matter in the mouth." (Tompa 2024, 136) I would like to point out that the English translation of the chapter contains a longer excerpt from Brodsky's poem – originally written in Russian – than the Hungarian

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[10] Moreover, the same Russian phrase already appeared in the first chapter, and this repetition only emphasizes it: "She stops in front of a stationery shop, having just remembered a favourite Russian expression: от нечего делать, meaning idleness. The reason for going into the shop is simply to use up excess time." (Tompa 2024, 11)

one. The Hungarian translation "*romnál tisztább romok számban lakoztak*" ("my mouth was inhabited by ruins cleaner than ruins") allows the above interpretation.

I have interpreted the Parthenon metaphor that appears in this quotation in the light of the whole poem. Here, the Wisdom tooth is given a symbolic meaning (written with a capital W), as a contrast between the old home and the new home, and is identified with the cradle of culture (the Parthenon), where the common trait is decay, desolation, and wisdom, since it was dedicated to the goddess of wisdom, Pallas Athena. On the other hand, the identification is based on a metonymic, geographic contact: the other continent (Europe). The teeth in the mouth in this poem, as we have seen in *Home*, are also markers of the old country – decaying (the teeth of an emigrant speaker bearing the traces of a "rotting culture"), but still reminiscent of the homeland (cf. amalgam fillings waiting to be replaced).

However, the poet referred to it in an interview as a humorous poem, and when talking about its genesis, he took the text literally. He responded to the interviewer's claim – "I think of the metaphor of the ruins of the Parthenon as decaying teeth"– thus: "The whole point is that is not metaphor actually – it is very literal especially since I came to Ann Arbor with my Russian dental work, so to speak." (Brodsky 1979, 64)

In the Brodsky poem, however, there is no mention of foreign matter, but rather the focus is the theme of the dentist. On the other hand, the figure of Brodsky plays a very important role in the whole novel, and concerning him, in the Hungarian tradition we might link him to Sándor Márai, in the sense that, at least in the interpretation of the narrator, as an emigrant poet he considers language to be his homeland. The chapter "The Speech" reflects on the moment when Brodsky was expelled by the Soviet authorities. He was asked why he would not emigrate to Israel: "According to the record, all Brodsky had to say was: 'Я русский литератор.' I am a Russian writer. This sentence meant that he wanted to live there. In the Russian language." (Tompa 2024, 303)

The foreignness of the tongue and the teeth is represented by *the own*, which becomes strange from one moment to another (this is only perceptible to the subject, it is a sensation). The third foreignness, the visible foreignness, is "the foreign matter in the mouth", the amalgam filling, which contrasts sharply with the colour of the teeth. It is alien, yet it represents the abandoned home. The emigrants carry the abandoned home with them, like the amalgam fillings that the patient refuses to replace. If we take it as a metaphor of adaptation, she does not want to adapt to her new home, she wants to keep something of her homeland. The figure

of the "common mouth" is formed; this heritage creates a community, somewhat ironically, between those from the old homeland.

This chapter also condenses the whole novel by introducing the contrast between the Painter and the writer: the difference between the two media and artistic attitudes. The Painter is immersed in the study of the head, in the spirit of portrait painting, while the writer's domain is language, in which he does not feel at home. Outside this chapter, the whole text of the novel also makes fascinating use of the ambiguity of the word *nyelv* ("tongue, language") and the concrete meanings of the organs of speech and the abstract meaning of the expression. The title of the chapter in question ("Tongue in Mouth") is also alluded to in the section on the character Ari, when the loss of one's own language (mother tongue), the lack of an authentic, self-identical language and the conquest of English are also discussed: "Proof of the fact that *language has ceased to exist in the mouth*,[11] using instead other people's borrowed language, which for them is at most a hired hut, a cheap bread and breakfast, a rental room but never a proper home. Triggers." (Tompa 2024, 123, my italics) Ari's loss of language is reported by the narrator: "Ari rarely posts, and if she does, then it's usually some drawings by her children or herself, most recently she posted a series of screams – five ageless and genderless faces screaming. *Teeth, tongue, veil of the palate in the wind*, long wrinkles on the faces, all drawn in biro. One of the drawings is on a thick restaurant napkin, from a Punjabi Restaurant. Other times, she posts photos or films, without any *captions*." (Tompa 2024, 125, my italics)

Here again, the text brings into play the semantics of the second member of the compound word *veil of the palate*, "ínyvitorla" (*vitorla* 'sail') in Hungarian, and amplifies it with the locative (in the wind), while the word *nyelv* is also used in two senses in the passage.[12] Whereas here the gesture of howling makes the inside of the mouth visible, the description of the unrestrained laughter in *The Hangman's House* becomes linguistically very similar: "and the blood-red *uvula*[13] could be seen in Juci's wide-open mouth, tossed in the gale of laughter that tore, free and unrestrained, from her throat, like the heavy, bloodstained but victorious banner of a fighter for freedom standing proud atop the peak." (Tompa 2021b, 257, my italics) We may note the parallel between the two phrases (*veil of the palate in the wind* and *tongue in*

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[11] Here again the choice of 'language' rather than 'tongue' eliminates the linguistic ambiguity, though in Hungarian it is one word (*nyelv*.)

[12] It is used once for *tongue* and twice for *captions* in a new sentence: "Nyelv nincs."

[13] Although the Hungarian texts both (*Home* and *The Hangman's House*) use the same word (*ínyvitorla*), the two translators rendered it in two different ways. In the citation from Home is translated *veil of the palate*. But in the second case using the word *uvula* this metaphor (sail - banner) based on the common idea of fluttering in the wind is not strongly founded.

mouth): both are locative phrases syntagms. This helps to maintain the simultaneity of concrete and figurative meanings.

The tongue is linked to the home not only through speech, but also through gastronomy as an organ of taste. The painter misses the flavours of his home, the taste of the spice in his chosen homeland is different, even though the name is the same: "His *tongue* and his tastebuds, those eighty-year-old warts, which are none other than his memories, do know that tarragon is French back home and Russian over here." (Tompa 2024, 155, my italics) In another part of the text, when reading the father's observation dossier, the writer ironically contrasts the materiality of writing, of fiction (page number), and "reality" (the physical materiality of the person observed):

> According to page 276, *in "Toma's fictional mouth the tongue* finds it hard to roll, it has always found it hard, perhaps even from the very beginning, because 'Toma' had never really believed in *language*, while he is displaying threatening behaviour, he points out that one can also use language in order to lie […]" (Tompa 2024, 206, my italics)

Andrea Tompa succeeds in exploiting the multidirectional possibilities of meaning-making offered by this dental scene. Perhaps the play with the word '*nyelv*' is too obvious, too easy, and she has made too much of this linguistic correspondence in her writing. However, it is a fine example of how a personal, painful trauma can be stripped away and wrapped in simple ordinariness.

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The Resonance of *Bios* and *Zoe* in Several of Ágnes Nemes Nagy's Poems Written around 1960[1]

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Abstract

After a brief explanation of Agamben's concepts of *bios* and *zoe*, and a discussion of Ágnes Nemes Nagy's specific use of sound devices, this paper analyses a few of her poems that relate to the genesis of her 1967 collection *Napforduló* [Solstice]. These poems attempt to give voice to those that, in a worldview constructed from a human perspective, are voiceless. Essentially melopoetic, these poems are also examples of *ars poetica* performative texts. Using to the full the phonetic and rhythmic resources of poetry, the poems also give an account of their own genesis. The study seeks to answer how these formal aspects of the poems contribute to their power, and how, in combination with their theme, they relate to the question of (im)personalisation and the suspension of the human factor, as well as of entering into the perspective plants might have on the world. It examines the means by which Ágnes Nemes Nagy was attempting to bring nature's non-anthropomorphic (yet organic) creatures to the fore, and to give them a voice.

Keywords

Ágnes Nemes Nagy, poetry, modern Hungarian literature, *bios*, *zoe*, Agamben, biopoetics, melopoetic, sound devices, nature, plants

The poems discussed here are from the 1950s, a decade of political oppression in Hungary, and from the period following Nemes Nagy's divorce (from 1944 she was married to Balázs Lengyel, with whom she co-edited the influential postwar literary journal *Újhold* between 1946 and 1948) and were published in her third collection, entitled *Napforduló* [Solstice]. This volume signified a turning point in Nemes Nagy's life; her contemporaries and critics saw it as the pinnacle of Nemes Nagy's objective poetry. For years prior,

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she had not been permitted to publish her poems, and from 1949 it also became impossible to publish *Újhold*. "Nemes Nagy's answer to censorship was to focus the repression inward and to work it through the intellect into precisely cut, passionate, philosophical shapes." (Szirtes 2011, 1617) Survival and annihilation are themes and concepts that she emphasises constantly in her poems, and that she later made explicit in her essays and interviews. One way she responded to social and private events in poetry was by distancing herself from the personal, from the self. Ágnes Nemes Nagy's poetry is often described as 'objective', and she refers to herself as an 'objective poet' (after Rilke, Eliot, and the Hungarian poet Mihály Babits). She extracts the 'I' from her poems: "a certain ellipsis-mass, I tell you, the mass of what is left out. And more importantly, the removal of the first-person singular from the centre of the poem. From now on, this poetic 'I' is somewhere else. In fact, it may not even be present" (Nemes Nagy 2004c, 240), says Nemes Nagy in an interview conducted by Lóránt Kabdebó in 1981. And this is how Nemes Nagy describes herself and her own poetry in an introduction (from 1980) to an English-language selection of her poems:

> Poetry knows something that we who make poetry do not. […] This unknown is communicated to me mainly by objects; that is why I try to relay objects to the reader: a geyser, a branch, the fragment of a statue, a tram, which may bring with them memories of war (the fundamental experience of my generation), or the experience of *natura* (living with nature: one of the threatened nostalgias of modern man), perhaps the myth of an Egyptian pharaoh (the modern myth: a model of our awareness of life). (Nemes Nagy 1980a, 93−94)

Related to this objectivity is a discussion of the non-human natural world. This is done with a wide range of poetic tools, in which besides the visual images, the sound, the rhythm, the coherence, the paronomasia, the rhyming of the words and the rhyming of the poem are also very important. As if

> [...] language itself, the sounding-performative language, were speaking. This is why we get the impression that the unity of sound, rhythm and prosody, of ideas, images, and semantic relationships in Nemes Nagy's poems is, so to speak, indissoluble. Or as Valéry put it, "the value of a poem lies in the indissolubility of sound and meaning". (Kulcsár Szabó 2022, 126)

The materiality and affectivity of the (poetic) word creates an atmosphere in which one cannot help but be absorbed, through which the poem resonates,

evoking impressions and feelings, but which is not merely an acoustic phenomenon; it is also a performative act of language. Wilhelm von Humboldt held that what is said shapes or makes ready the unsaid. Nemes Nagy repeatedly refers to the poet's task as being to record the "so far nameless and inexpressible vision" (Nemes Nagy 1998a*, 14.*). Elsewhere she says: "I am a poet, and therefore I mine the inexpressible, the unexpressed or that which is difficult to express" (Nemes Nagy 2004b, 660). In fact, her poems also contain the following *ars poetica*: "*ne mondd soha a mondhatatlant / mondd a nehezen mondhatót,*" that is, 'never say the unsayable / say what is difficult to say,' as found in the famous early poem, *Elégia egy fogolyról* [Elegy on a Prisoner] (1946). One of the most significant examples of this, and perhaps the greatest challenge in Nemes Nagy's poetry of experimentation with the untouchable, is when she "gives voice" to the living creatures of nature (*zoe*), and within this, when she "voices" plants. As evidenced by a great number of close readings over the past decade,[3] Nemes Nagy's work was, in terms of poetic devices and themes, a corpus ahead of its time, raising inspiring questions about the various manifestations of life (such as our relationship to plants, animals, and the transcendent, and the reassessment of our ideas related to them). Zoltán Németh recently commented on the prominent role of plants in two contemporary poetry collections:

> Plants, which had been relegated to the background and had hitherto been the backdrop of our existence, have suddenly become the focus of these texts, and they are asking questions about ontology, epistemology, philosophy, and ethics – in short, about the writeability – of vegetative existence. They are confronting us, through literary writing, with propositions about the individuality, intelligence, nature, and communication of plants. The plant speaks, or rather the plant is given voice and language through the poems in these volumes, the plant speaks through them. (Németh 2022, 316)

The fact that it is only in the new millennium that literary criticism and history have brought the study of organicity, the "voice of the plant", to the fore does not mean that the phenomenon has not been present for a long time in arts such as the writing of fiction.

Man, as the apex of the world's hierarchical system of living, constructs his image of himself by distinguishing his own being from that of *zoe*. He is *bios*. Of the many categories of philosophical investigation and divisions of life, it is

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[3] Four of the twenty texts in the following volume deal with the connection between Ágnes Nagy Nemes and Biopoetics: Balajthy and Mezei, eds. 2022.

Agamben's dichotomy of *bios* and *zoe* which has become popular, and which currently characterises the methodological trend. The works of later, differently oriented but essentially eco- or even post-humanist theorists are irrelevant to this study, as it is not the ecological—ecocritical aspect of the poems that are of interest here but the manifestations of *bios* as life. Agamben's ideas also chime with this biopoetics angle because he places the phenomena of language and poetry at the intersection of nature and culture. While this paper does not aim at an extended study of their conceptual history, it is nevertheless worth introducing (sketching) and characterizing the conceptual pair *bios*—*zoe* insofar as it may influence how the poems under discussion are approached.[4] For this reason, the study uses the terms *bios* and *zoe* according to Agamben's interpretation.

This specific pair of concepts has been definitive since ancient philosophy, and attempts have often been made to capture the essence of human existence through this duality. Aristotle wrote that the path to human happiness *(eudaimonia)* leads through the *bios*, i.e., through being in culture, in society (being organised in a larger community or polis).[5] *Zoe* also means life, a vitality that is not endowed with specifically human characteristics. In his 1995 book *Homo Sacer*, in which he wrote about "bare life", Giorgio Agamben explained the concepts of *bios* and *zoe* (Agamben 1998), reinterpreting the Aristotelian dichotomy through the ideas of Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault (Dubreuil–Eagle 2006, 84), as well as Károly Kerényi (Fenyvesi 2014, 45—68). For Agamben, *bios* is sovereign human life and existence (with its sociality and cultural embeddedness) while *zoe* is life itself, which can be applied to all vitality (organic life without *bios*), from the self-organising processes of nature, from weather through plants to animals. Man is a part of both, but if he shares only in *zoe*-life (i.e., bare, biological life: *nuda vita*), he is merely "a survivor" and excluded from the kind of living that characterizes an individual or even a group, i.e., from the perspective of a meaningful life. He is excluded from a life which goes beyond simply being, a life which has a reason and a purpose.

Bios and *zoe* are the central concepts of biopoetics, since authors associated with biopoetics in literature mostly investigate how life as a being, a living organism, can be made available through texts, specifically through their language(s), or more

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[4] See Dubreuil and Eagle 2006, 83—98, for more on *bios* and *zoe*.

[5] The *oikos*, the domestic sphere, is separated from the *polis* (the arena of political life), as a place where biological needs are dominant and subsistence is important*;* the *oikos* is driven by more subjective and momentary goals than the *polis*. *Bios*-life is partly equivalent to the *polis* (communal existence) and *zoe*-life to the *oikos* (self-preservation). Aristotle writes that "We have good reasons therefore for not speaking of an ox or horse or any other animal as being happy, because none of these is able to participate in noble activities. [...] Happiness, as we said, requires both complete goodness [perfect virtue] and a complete lifetime [fulfilled life]." (Aristotle 1934, 47)

precisely, how our concepts of life are shaped by poetry, and how our concepts of life shape poetry. Biopoetics is presented as a way of reading that approaches poems from the perspective of life and, in this context, nature. It is motivated by questions such as what vitality is, how a body can be captured, what the relationship is between the living and the inanimate, human and animal, human and plant, nature and culture, and, above all, how this is expressed in the space of language arts, i.e. how it is expressed at the (lyric) linguistic, poetic level.

These two contrasting concepts are not mutually exclusive:[6] in Agamben's example, Pulcinella, a character in the Italian *commedia dell'arte* "has chosen nothing: he is that which has never chosen to do or be – not even by mistake […] [His] is not a chargeable action, it entails no responsibility" (Agamben 2018, 49, 64). Veronika Darida compares Pulcinella to the Hungarian character Vitéz László, a vulgar, masked, "embodied ideal, [...] neither a human being nor divine. [...] he is outside or beyond death, which does not touch him" (Darida 2017, 47−48). Pulcinella is also a representative of *zoe*, and his life "seems to stand outside the common and collective concept of life: *bios*. He represents a form of life which cannot therefore be subject to biopolitics, i.e., life at its freest and least expropriated." (Darida 2017, 48) Agamben also discusses how in the concentration camps, Nazi power (the sphere of existence) reduced the lives of vulnerable people to *zoe* by taking control of them (Agamben 2018, 71−101).[7] Nemes Nagy had indirect experience of this, as when she was young she lived through the Second World War and the siege of Budapest; she experienced what it was like to be a vulnerable woman. Her best friend was deported and died (about which she wrote the poem *Elegy on a Prisoner*), and Alaine Polcz, with whom she later survived the street warfare of 1956, was raped by soldiers several times during the Second World War.

This paper analyses some short poems written after 1956, which the author published in *Napforduló* [Solstice] or which were published posthumously. The personal and professional difficulties Nemes Nagy encountered in this period were not inconsequential: an immediate threat to life and limb, an existential crisis, the aftermath of the closing of the literary magazine she had been involved with, the breakdown of her marriage, abortions, and other losses. These crises are inevitably reflected in her poems.

In these poems, *bios* and *zoe* are both present, offering a stimulating contrast. They are an ambitious attempt at overriding anthropocentric-system thinking,

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[6] Thus, in Agamben's theory, criticized by Jacques Derrida and others, *bios* and *zoe* are not exclusive opposites of each other, and even Aristotle (whom he misinterprets, among others) does not see them as such.

[7] Part Three: The Camp as Biopolitical Paradigm of the Modern

at not considering the non-anthropomorphic *zoe* as inferior life at all. They try, in this way, to get closer to *zoe* through processes of de-anthropomorphisation, and through their own inner questions. We are witnessing a kind of repositioning of anthropogenesis in which there is no qualitative difference between the two components of human life, *bios* and *zoe,* which are both part of nature and, indeed, of human life. Agamben, on the other hand, could see these two concepts as the main pair of opposites in Western politics precisely because he saw them as separable through the mere existence of life and politics, or exclusion and inclusion (Agamben 2018*,* 11−12): what is excluded from *bios* is obviously not (a) human. Rosi Braidotti relates nonhuman or posthuman theory to the rise of *zoe* (Braidotti 2013, 60). The poetry of Nemes Nagy can be seen in synergy with this: her poems operate from a nonhuman perspective, a perspective of *zoe.* These stances seek to eliminate the anthropomorphic perspective and, in order to do so, make use of less and less personification, attempting to discuss (organic) objects from their own, imagined point of view. This period is characterised by stripped-down language, the elimination of personal pronouns, and a tendency towards impersonal speech. At the same time, there is an increasing focus on nature, animals, and plants, especially trees and plant "survivors", which are capable of reviving with just a little water (a symbol of life).

Other important motifs are the spiral or circular shape, and hardness, including vulnerability and enclosure in some kind of hard material construction (degraded life: *zoe*).

The first poem under discussion is *Csigalépcső* [Spiral Staircase]*,* which was written in 1958 or 1959. Never published in this form while Nemes Nagy was alive, it was only printed in 2016:

Csigalépcső		**Spiral staircase**
A csigalépcsőn *hogy* leszöktem,	A	Down the spiral staircase *as* I leaped,
mint a kavics, *úgy* lepörögtem,	A	*like* the pebble, *[so]* I whirled,
búgott a csigahéj utánam,	B	after me the snail shell boomed
mint az emlék a puszta házban,	B	*like* the memory in the bare house,
zörögtem,	A	I rattled,
mint a szilánk a koponyában.[8]	B	*like* the splinter in the skull.[9]

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[8] The whereabouts of the manuscript version is unknown; the text was first published in 2016 and written by the author in 1958 or 1959, according to the publisher, see Nemes Nagy 2016. (Emphasis mine.)

[9] Translated by Boglárka Hardy. (Emphasis mine. A. P.)

The structure of this short poem reflects its title, as the lines are connected to each other like a spiral staircase or a spring; they are intertwined not only by their motifs but also by their grammatical structures. The whole poem is a single sentence, coherence being ensured by the conjunction *hogy* 'as', the adverb *úgy* 'so' and the three instances of *mint* 'like', a conjunction. The twisting shape of the spiral stairs also recalls the form of the DNA double-helix, i.e., the shape of organic cells. The spiral staircase and the enclosed space in which the stairs (as a human, architectural construction, of course) lead from somewhere to somewhere else, look like a skull or a bare house. The spiral shell itself, meanwhile, is brought to life. The words *csigalépcső* 'spiral stairs' and *ház* 'house' are created in the grammatical space by the words *lépcsőház* 'staircase' and *csigaház* 'spiral shell' or 'snail's house'. The stair[10] as a human construction is basically a symbol of ascension, purification, knowledge, and is often used in initiation stories and rituals. Accordingly, downward movement can mean the bringing down to earth of some unconscious immersion or celestial knowledge.

In Hungarian, the word *szökés* 'escape, leap, jump, jump down, run away, disappear' has multiple meanings, but there is no precisely equivalent term in English. The word *leszökés* (here in the English poem it has been replaced by 'leaped') is also ambiguous; *szök(ell)és* means not only to jump and to leave a place in a hurry, but also to be mysterious, to act without the knowledge of others. In this vast, empty, human-made space (and body), sound is complemented by a kinetic event: the *búgás* and *zörgés* 'booming' and 'rattling' are a consequence of jumping down the stairs, of bouncing off. These themselves provide the 'action' in the poem; no other verbs are used except these.

All the lines of the original six-line poem are nine syllables long, except the fifth line, which consists of a single three-syllable word, *zörögtem* [I rattled], and uses a rare metre, an amphibrach: (∪ — ∪). The reader's mind supplies the missing syllables by 'hearing' a twice-repeated echo of the word (with these echoes, the line consists of exactly nine syllables). This word is, after all, connected to all three structures beginning with the word *like*. Rattling as a sound is a continuous, self-replicating action: 'I rattled like the pebble' (1). It is clear in the last three lines of the poem that the single 'rattled' applies, on account of the enjambment, both to the line before and the one after: 'I rattled like the memory in the bare house' (2) and 'I rattled like the splinter in the skull' (3). The onomatopoeic word *zörög* 'rattle' sets

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[10] In her essays, Nemes Nagy writes several times about staircases, for example: "Because the complexity of objects, of a stone, of a potato bush, of a staircase, of a Ruffle Elephant's Ear as it is – is, after all, unreachable." (Nemes Nagy 2004a, 105)

the tone of the 'I' both in the house and in the skull. This activity (rattling) invades the passive space and the silence. It dominates the poem and is connected to the speaker's self (the first-person singular) and to 'pebble,' 'memory' and 'splinter.' The dominance of the sounds *cs* /tʃ/, *sz* /s/, *g* /g/ and *k* /k/ in the Hungarian poem *(csiga, kavics, koponya, emlék, szilánk)* evokes the noises themselves: the velar plosives of the voiceless–voiced pair *g–k* make a knocking sound. (This cannot be very well reproduced, nor is it fully translatable in the English version: 'snail, pebble, skull, memory, splinter.') The voiceless consonants *cs* (the affricate /tʃ/) and the fricative *sz* /s/ add a characteristic scratching and hissing respectively. In particular, the consonants *(z, r* and *g)* in the word *zörögtem* 'rattled,' which is already onomatopoeic, reinforce these sounds: the *z* fricative is accompanied by the *r* trill consonant and the hard *g* sounds.

What is exciting is the space of the poem, a space which is delineated and bounded. This spatial structure is like the closed domain of a house or a skull; apart from the top-down movement there is no other direction, no change of position, no way to get out of it. (Again, we feel obliged to find parallels to this sense of claustrophobia in the biographical details of the poet's life.)

It is worth referring to T.S. Eliot – and noting the adjective he uses – when he writes about the staircase in his poem *Ash Wednesday* as "the *toothed* gullet of an agèd shark".[11] Nemes Nagy was clearly familiar with the poem, as she herself quoted this passage in an essay: 'Öreg cápa *reszelős* torka' (Nemes Nagy 2004a, 96).[12] (*Reszelős* is not equivalent to 'toothed,' but it has a similar meaning: 'grating or rasping'). Mihály Babits, editor-in-chief of *Nyugat* and a poet Nemes Nagy greatly admired, wrote a famous poem which likewise relates to this: *Jónás könyve* [The Book of Jonah]. There is also an obvious Rilkean parallel with the seventh part of *The Duino Elegies* (which Ágnes Nemes Nagy translated into Hungarian), in which the movement is also vertical, but there it is from the bottom up, to a transcendent plane.

In Nemes Nagy's poem the 'skull' represents organicity – the human body is present rather as *zoe*. However, in a figurative sense, the skull embodies the place of thoughts because it is in the brain. It is in the skull that the thoughts are formed which make us human. Thus, through thoughts or memories it is also a manifestation of *bios*. Ágnes Nemes Nagy was already using the snail in connection with the skull and memory in her early poems, for example in *Hadijelvény* [Military Colours] where we find 'snail of my brain,' 'bone' and 'skull' and in which the speaker holds up its

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[11] Emphasis mine. A. P.

[12] Emphasis mine. A. P.

crushed skull like a standard. In *Emlékezet* [Memory], we see a different image used for the mind and memory. Here, 'little guys' are 'hurrying up and down' inside the brain as if in a building, relaying messages. There are corridors, shelves, drawers, files etc. In this way *bios* is represented as dominating *zoe*, the human mind as controlling biological function while anthropomorphizing *zoe*. In the imagined world of the mind, little people run around the brain as in a building, relaying messages. There are corridors, shelves, drawers, files, etc.

The lines of *Csigalépcső* [Spiral Staircase] are contained within the dialogic-dramatic poem *Szobrok* [Statues] (Hernádi 2017, 230−253), an emblematic poem written before 1966 as part of the cycle entitled *Között* [Between] and published with some alterations in the collection *Napforduló* [Solstice]. While *Szobrok* was widely commented on when it was published, there is insufficient space to discuss its reception here, and analysis must be restricted to some aspects related to the poem *Csigalépcső*. The opening stanza of the forty-four-line poem is a version of the previous poem:

Keserű.	Bitter.
Keserű volt a tenger, amikor	It was bitter, the sea, when
a sziklatorkon legörögtem,	I rolled through the rock-throat down
csigalépcsőn kavics, pörögtem,	a spiral staircase, A shingle, I spun,
búgott a csigahéj utánam,	behind me the hum of snail-shell
mint az emlék a puszta házban,	like memory in an abandoned house
zörögtem,	I rattled
mint *vasszilánk* a koponyában. […][13]	like a *skullful* of shrapnel. […][14]

Nemes Nagy modified the text so that the number of syllables remained the same, ensuring all lines have nine syllables, except two, the first and the penultimate one. She used, for example, "*mint a szilánk*" 'like the splinter' instead of "*mint vasszilánk*" 'like [...] shrapnel' – in this way in Hungarian the word, the line, is made more powerful, more resonant, while in English the definite article makes the splinter more specific, but creates quite a different image compared to the original. Szirtes's translation better reflects the original: "like loose metal, shrapnel in the skull" (Nemes Nagy 2004d). Unlike *Spiral Staircase,* in *Statues,* the view, the image is

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[13] Emphasis mine. A. P.

[14] Translated by Bruce Berlind (Nemes Nagy 1980b, 32). (Emphasis mine. A. P.) On this poem, its meaning and translation, see Berlind 1993. This translation is very different from the other translation of this poem by Szirtes (Nemes Nagy 2004d, 31) or another by Maxton (Nemes Nagy 1988, 35).

immediately expanded by being set in nature: on a cliff by the sea. The (downward) spinning on the spiral staircase is of course only a metaphor here: the scene takes place in a much wider space, and the pebble or snail shell is a much more integral part of it, whose 'humming' (the translators did not, however, choose the best term; whispering sounds like 'murmuring' or 'susurration' would have been preferable) is also semantically connected with the sea.

In this poem, the sense of enclosure in a house or a skull is also dissolved (as a pebble rolling down) by the speaker, who directs the reader's gaze to the water's edge. Down there, there are statues, and the speaker's anthropomorphic form is revealed through the use of the possessive adjective 'my:' 'my skull', 'my shoulder', and 'my helmet'. (The last of these confirms that the speaker is not an animal, a helmet being a man-made object, an item of clothing.)[15] The pebbles rolled down, and "I lay there spread against the cliff / an animated filth laid over stone" Nemes Nagy 2004d*, 31 (translation by Szirtes). (Another translation by Berlind renders it as: "I lay smeared out on the rock, / life – the filth of it – on a stone", Nemes Nagy 1980b*, 32.) This can be read as a kind of *zoe*-life confession. We may be reminded once again of Mihály Babits and the following extract from his long poem, *The Book of Jonah*: "*eleven* állat, nyult el a homokban" (in a literal translation: '*alive* animal, stretched out in the sand').[16] In this line of Nemes Nagy's ("life – the filth of it – on a stone") the representation of vulnerability and helplessness is important. Mária Hernádi considers this section of the poem, the dramatic fall, as evoking the passage through the birth canal, the movement as following the direction of gravity. The object that is moving down a hard channel, falling downwards, is also hard, making the birth dramatic:

> In the poem, both the one being born and the one from whom the newborn emerges are wounded, and so is everything that is being created on the shore of birth and is changing its mode of being. [...] In the middle section of the poem, however, the speaker appears as the opposite of the landscape that receives it: a soft and vulnerable body of organic matter in the inorganic, in what is hard and inviolable. The nouns 'tortoise-egg,' 'my skull,' 'bubble,' 'filth,' 'shoulder' and 'blood' belong to the organic world as well as the verb 'boil' the verb 'smeared,'

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[15] The helmet is primarily a military type of head protection. The *sisakvirág*, literally 'helmetflower' (also known as wolfsbane or aconite) is obviously so named because of its shape and its poisonous nature. This brings with it the interpretation: in nature (against nature?), man must defend himself.

[16] Emphasis mine. A. P.

the adjective 'leather-covered' and the repeatedly used, highly emphatic adjective 'filthy'. (Hernádi 2017, 239−240)

In Ágnes Nemes Nagy's poetry, statues are even more permanent objects than the oak, writes Mária Hernádi in another study. (The tree is one of the central motifs in her poetry: it is a mediator between heaven and earth, between the living and the dead, and is also a ladder, a transmitter, etc. Of all the trees, the oak appears particularly frequently and plays a significant role in Nemes Nagy's poetry.) In contrast to trees, statues are not living organisms but man-made objects. A statue is timeless and held up as an example. It "is made of hard material to express its timelessness; it is tall, usually larger than a human body, and is often placed on a pedestal to be visible to all. To raise a statue is to make someone timeless, to take him out of his temporal existence, bound to the integral organism of nature, and to place him before people as an example, an idea." (Hernádi 2015, 91)

Also in the same collection is the famous *Akhenaton*-cycle,[17] including, for example, *Amikor* [When]: *"Wherefore when I made a god / made I him of adamant. / Mightier than body / so I might trust his mercy."*[18] Nemes Nagy identifies the Easter Islands and the statues there as the source of the poem. As she wrote in her *American Diary* of 1979: "I long to go to Europe like I long to enter a cave – But I still think of the Pacific Ocean. I will look across it, all the way to the Easter Islands. Which I wrote about in my poem *Statues.*" (Nemes Nagy 2015, 254). Easter Island (an island, not islands) is home to more than eight hundred anthropomorphic stone sculptures (*moai*), standing with their backs to the sea. The 1957 book on the sculptures by the Norwegian researcher Thor Heyerdahl (*Aku-Aku: The Secret of Easter Island*) was popular in the 1960s, although many of its basic theses were later disproved. (According to recent research the sculptures may have marked water sources, freshwater coastal seeps.)

In contrast to *Spiral Stairs, Elvesztett hangok ülnek itt* [Lost Voices Are Sitting Here] focuses on plants and operates with more extensive sound effects. It was originally untitled and dated 10 January 1960. As the poem shows, muteness is related to dehydration; the poem refers to the impossibility of making a sound in the context of thirst. In the first half of the poem, the word *hang* 'sound' appears four times and is then replaced by certain repeated sounds from the natural world (the words

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[17] The word *pharaoh* (Egyptian per-aa) means 'great house', which originally did not refer to a person, but to the royal palace or court itself, see Bartha 1933.

[18] Trans. by Hugh Maxton (Nemes Nagy1988, 49). Another translation: 'In carving myself a god, I kept in mind / to choose the hardest stone that I could find. / Harder than flesh and not given to winching: / its consolation should appear convincing.' *(When)* – by Szirtes (Nemes Nagy 2004d, 49).

reszelős, zörgő and *szétzizeg,* dominated by the consonants *s/sz/, z̧ /z/, r /r/* and *g /g/*, rendered in English as *rasping, rattling, rustling,* similarly dominated by /r/, /s/, /ŋ/ and the hard, aspirated /p/ and /t/). This contrasts with 'muted nature' at the end of the poem. The poem is a prayer-like example of giving voice to *zoe*, of asking for a voice (i.e., for life).[19]

[Elvesztett hangok ülnek itt]	**[Lost Voices Are Sitting Here]**
Elvesztett hangok ülnek itt	Lost voices are sitting here
apró bokrokban, szárazon,	in tiny bushes, withered,
egy hangot adj, egy hangot adj,	give me a voice, give me a voice,
szikkadtan is felfuttatom,	I raise it up even desiccated,
egy jerikói-rózsa-hang,	a Jericho-Rose-sound,
egy reszelős ördögszekér,	a rasping white-devil sound,
egy szürke, fekete, szürke, zörgő	a grey, black, grey, rattling
szakadt gubanc-gyökér,	torn tangled-root,
szakadtan is csak karikázzon,	torn as it is, let it tumble
szálljon, kerek tövis-köteg,	let it fly, balled thorn-bundle
zizegje szét avarcsomókkal	with clumped-up leaves let it
az elnémult természetet –	rustle muted nature apart –[20]

The poem also mentions specific plant types (weeds / herbs): the sounds and nature (form and movement) of the Rose of Jericho and the "white-devil" provide the metaphor web of the poem. (In the Hungarian poem the literal meaning of *ördögszekér* is 'devil's chariot,' but it is the folk name of Eryngium campestre, a plant similar to tumbleweed. When tumbleweed is torn out of the desert ground by the wind it can be blown along for considerable distances.) As the dead structure of the plant Nemes Nagy calls "white-devil" rolls in the wind, the outer stalks are gradually broken off and it becomes ball-like. If it happens to come to rest in a damp area, it can germinate rapidly, even given very little moisture. The Rose of Jericho is the name of a desert grass, the branches of which curl up when dry and open when wet. This is why the plant is a symbol of resurrection and is used in this context in this poem. Even when it appears to be withered, it is still alive and can be revived by water in a short time.

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[19] Mária Hernádi calls this piece a fragment and considers it a twin of the poem *Parable*, because the poem "seems to restate the same theme – the knowledge of the power of faith in life: in the life of words and poetry. [...] it can itself be considered an experiment in writing a parable poem […]' (Hernádi 2015, 68).

[20] My translation. P. A

The great Hungarian poet of the 19th century, János Arany, also wrote a poem about plants surviving in the desert. ('The thorny white-devil is riding in the wilderness')[21] as did the 20th century poet Attila József ('My summer is coming to an end so quickly. / The wind carries me on a white-devil … ').[22] A generation later, the poet Lőrinc Szabó wrote a poem entitled *Szamártövis* [Musk Thistle], about a similar plant. The musk thistle is well adapted to rocky, grassy, desert habitats, and clings easily to other organisms, making it a fast-growing weed, one to be wary of on account of its prickly nature. The poem includes an exclamation (a self-reflexive invocation): 'Don't hurt me!' In Lőrinc Szabó's poem this plant 'just wants to live'; where life kills others, it, the 'wedge of desert roads' stands still (this plant stays put, it does not roll away). Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó writes that:

> […] it bears witness not only to its own aggressive character (or to the instinctive thorniness of existence), but also, conversely, in a way to the destructive intervention of the human, of culture, in nature. What is more, it even asks […] whether the opposition of nature and culture in Lőrinc Szabó's poem is sustainable. […] But what […] is the message for the future of the living, the self-surviving plant? This message, according to the instruction given in the poem's conclusion, is in a way a message of life, of life surviving itself, which, at the moment of the 'death of summer', is aiming at a 'new spring'. (Kulcsár-Szabó 2018, 11–12.)

In Nemes Nagy's poem too, the common feature of the two plants (the Rose of Jerico and the white-devil) is that they are both survivors, able to recover their vitality even from a state of death. Here too, it may be useful to refer to what we know of the poet's personal life. Perpetually threatened with censorship and even of being erased altogether, Nemes Nagy was continually having to reinvent her professional life (and her private life). The risk of being plunged into an existential crisis, being in physical danger, resurrection, new beginnings, and revival (survival as *zoé*) are therefore constant motifs in her poetry. (In the 1940s and 1960s, a whole generation of *Újhold* writers had a similar experience).

Both plants, as a 'balled thorn-bundle' are able to fly. As the poem's apostrophic conclusion says, they do so in order to shake and stir-up 'muted nature,' to spread the news of life. For there is news in things: "this is the sacred conviction of the objective

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[21] My translation. P. A "Tüskés ördögszekér nyargal a pusztában" (*Rózsa és Ibolya* [Rose and Violet]).

[22] My translation. P. A "Ily gyorsan betelik nyaram. / Ördögszekéren hord a szél—" (*Nyár* [Summer]).

poet; what she believes or experiences is that objects are inhabited by gods who send her signs, signs of intelligence beyond recognition." (Nemes Nagy 2004a, 108).

In order to spread this news, the poem becomes performative, with the iterative-magical-rhythmic (spondee–iamb–spondee–iamb) third line of 'give me a voice, give me a voice', the rasping–rattling onomatopoeic words (the wind) and the continuous use of the sounds *sz* /s/, *c* /ts/ and *z* /z/ (*elvesztett, szárazon, szikkadtan, reszelős, ördögszekér, szürke, szürke, zörgő, szakadt, guban*c*, szakadtan, szálljon, zizegje, szét, természetet*) 'lost, withered, desiccated, rasping, white-devil, grey, grey, rattling, torn, tangled, torn, fly, rustle, apart and nature,' all of which is further intensified by internal rhythm (*szikkadtan is – szakadtan is; szürke, fekete – szürke, zörgő; zizegje szét – természetet*) 'desiccated – torn; grey, black – grey, rattling; rustle apart –nature'.

In the poems under discussion, *melos* dominates over *opsis*, with language itself playing a very special role. "[A literary text] must not only be read, it must also be listened to – even if only mostly with our inner ear." (Gadamer 1989, 42–43) These poems by Nemes Nagy are melopoetic (from the ancient Greek word *melopoiós* 'song-maker, poet') in the sense that they are melodic and singable. According to Ezra Pound, there are three kinds of poetry: *phanopoeia*, *logopoeia*, and *melopoeia*. *Melopoeia* is "wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or tend of that meaning. […] melopoeia can be appreciated by a foreigner with a sensitive ear, even though he be ignorant of the language in which the poem is written. It is practically impossible to transfer or translate it from one language to another, save perhaps by divine accident, and for half a line at a time." (Pound 1968, 25)

The poem [*Lost Voices Are Sitting Here*] points out that the apparent silence and desiccation of nature is not permanent, but part of a circular system. The leaf litter is a piece of dead nature (as it consists of rattling leaves and other dry, fallen, dead plant debris), but mixed in with them is *zoe:* the 'tangled-root' of living plants.

The speaker appears only in the fourth line of the text: "*szikkadtan is felfuttato*m" '*I* raise it up even desiccated' with the use of the first-person singular verb and is perceptible in the following section: "*egy hangot adj* [nekem]" 'give *me* a voice,' which seems to be a prayer to a supreme being, a god: a single sound is enough, a sign of life, and the silence will be over.[23]

The poem gives the illusion that it rhymes throughout, although only every second line contains a rhyme. This structure speeds up the rhythm of the reading, which is also enhanced by the fact that the poem consists of a single sentence. It begins

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[23] Emphasis mine. A. P.

with a capital letter and reaches its conclusion through a series of juxtapositions and expository clauses, culminating in a dash instead of a period, as if to demonstrate the calming, exhaling effect of a single breath after a single request, but also to suggest that the text itself is a circular unit: it can be read in a circle, starting again from the beginning.

Mention should also be made of the poem *Fügefák* [Fig Trees], which is also melopoetic, and in which the presence of circularity is striking through the moon– grains–figs relationship. The iambic slope of the poem, which begins with anapaests, then dissolves into spondees and tribrachys to finally mark the performative silence with a single long syllable: "*Csönd.*" 'Silence'. *[Fig Trees]* contains rhyming couplets until the middle of the poem (*fügefák–holdvilág, alatt–halad, konganak–a magvak*) 'fig-tree–moonlit, below–passes, gong– the seeds,' but from the eighth line onwards the poem runs into silence. Although the last word of the ninth line – *hallgat* 'silence' – still resonates with the last pair of rhymes, semantically it prepares to fade out to the silence of the last three lines.

Beyond the stanzas and the rhymes, there is a maturity, even a softness to the words and the sounds which suggest different sound effects. In the first two lines the two anapaests begin with hard sounds: the voiceless *cs* /tʃ/ and *sz* /s/ (affricate and fricative) are followed by a hard fricative *f* /f/ and then the velar plosives *g* /g/ and *k* /k./ This hardness is then dissolved through the sounds *m* /m/, *l* /l/, *and n* /n/ in the sound combination *ld* /ld/ "*hold*" 'moon' and especially *ng* /ng/ (in which the g is pronounced as a hard /g/): "*csengős, konganak, csengenek, döngése*" 'ringing, jingling, belling, tinkling'.

Later, in [*Fig Trees*]*,* the inner ringing of the fig ('In their bosom the seeds are ringing')[24] is contrasted with the spaciousness of the outside world (giant sky) – the internal ringing is thus contrasted with the external rumbling (*döng*, meaning 'to make a deep, dull, echoing sound'). Finally, the lines invite us to carefully consider what the human ear perceives as silence: "*Ércből / Rezeg a / Csönd*" ['From the ore / Vibrates / The / Silence'] (Nemes Nagy 2016, 117). There is no subject, no speaker, no person in the poem. Although the human, the intervention of *bios* appears in it through the herding of goats and their ringing, life is directly present through fig trees, goats, and ores – the various *zoe*-entities of nature.

Majom [Monkey], from 1959, also features figs and, like [*Fig Trees*], is linked to the theme of life through its form and tone. In this poem, the bell motif, the instrument, already implicit in the previous poem, is amplified. The first two lines are an *ars*

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[24] My translation A. P. 'Öblükben csengenek a magvak'.

poetica-like alliterative opening, and the passage from the third to the eighth line describes the shore visible from the boat and its distance. The speaker does not take possession of the territory that is solid ground, and which has no possessor yet. Something or someone – a plant, an animal and human construct, an organic or inorganic object (a tool) is hanging from a tree on the waterfront. A tiny monkey (in Hungarian: *csepp* 'drop') hangs on the branches like a big fig or a glass lute – the three objects are not only close in shape but also in size. The word *csepp* has a double meaning in Hungarian: on the one hand, it refers to the smallness of the animal, and on the other hand, the shape of the drop resembles that of a fig or a lute. In the poem [*Fig Trees*] the fig resembles a bell, and it swings and sways like a bell. In *Monkey*, however, an animal is added to the fig along with a similar-shaped object, the lute. The lute has been recently abandoned and is still vibrating. It is described as *pohos* (meaning 'big-bellied'). This stringed instrument (lute or lyre) is one of the oldest *topos*es in poetry – in [*Monkey*] the speaker sees it from a moving vessel and is not certain what he or she is looking at. Still vibrating-trembling, the speaker longs for the shore but declares 'I will not land.' So, the speaker does not take the *opportunity* in their field of vision, they pass it up (they do not land on the shore and do not come into contact with the instrument), putting their faith in reason instead. The speaker represents the *bios* point of view, they have anthropomorphic attributes: a face, hands and a coat. Like the helmet before, here the rubberised jacket is a reference to humanity – clothing is not characteristic of any other species but man, so it is a distinguishing mark that separates us from plants and animals. The poem implies that the world on the shore is one without meaning – in the first two lines the speaker says, "I sidle cautiously / towards meaninglessness," i.e., towards a nonsense world.

According to Martin Heidegger, the hand possesses the essence of man (Heidegger 1982, 118–119). The image of the hanging monkey is exciting, if only because it seems to contradict this: in the world of nonsense, the monkey hangs with his *hands;* in such a world you can use your hand, but in a much less conscious, more instinctive ('animalistic') way. The monkey carries a dual meaning: it is a source of levity and humour, but also the animal closest to man. It has highly developed limbs and – together with other primates (chimpanzees, gorillas, orangutans etc.) – is the only type of animal other than humans that possesses true hands. In the poem *[Monkey]* (whose title is after all, taken from the animal), the other functions of the hand are implicit, but there are also explicit indications at several points: the

hand guides, directs, writes, plays the instrument, (and extremely hidden, implicit:) blesses, makes the sign of the cross, etc.

The owner of the gaze in the poem is an outsider, i.e., the spectator and the spectated are in 'separate worlds.' The viewer is separated from those they are looking at by the sea, even if they are very close to them (near the shore). They gaze at undisturbed, unconquered nature (in which the monkey seen in the landscapes is part of *zoe*-life), and the desire is born in the speaker to be part of this nearby world, a world which seems to be calling them, yet distancing itself from them. This world, a world of meaninglessness, "may mean the freedom to escape from the domination of rationality and the poetic challenge of a completely new way of speaking, perhaps more separated from the intellect." (Hernádi 2015*, 98)

The conclusion to be drawn from the interpretations here is that melopoetic factors are integral to these poems. As *ars poetica* and performative texts, they also report on their own genesis in the phonetic-rhythmic way a poem can. The poems analysed (and their variants) are not Nemes Nagy's best-known, nor are they widely discussed, despite containing features that would reveal themselves later in her oeuvre. The poetic change in her oeuvre that began in the late 1950s (but took place gradually and was only fully realised a decade later) can be seen for the first time in these pieces. Nemes Nagy's poetry was epistemological and phenomenological, seeking to understand the phenomena of 'life' and dealing with existential questions. The use of Agamben's concepts helps us to understand the qualities of 'life' in the chosen period, in the chosen poems, with a strong emphasis on the dichotomies of predestination vs. choice, vulnerability vs. freedom, and speaking vs. silence. It seems that in the early 1960s Nemes Nagy was able to 'process' the past in her lyric poems through impersonality, and that this went hand in hand with the use of natural imagery and metaphors.

What I mean by this change is that the subject eclipses itself, and thus the human quality (*bios*), which is unique to humanity, is replaced by objects, in this case nature and its non-human inhabitants (which can be described by the word *zoe* in Agamben's constellation). Because the "force fields of objects are comforting," and objects help "in finding the nameless" (Nemes Nagy 2004e, 33., transl. by me. A. P.), the objective poet is "continually addressed by objects. [...] In order to capture in poetry what is beyond the known, in order, that is, to express one of the chief poetic aims of our century, the objective poet's inner life makes use of a frequency band which allows us to hear the signals emitted by the nameless – most often bouncing back off objects," writes Nemes Nagy (Nemes Nagy 2004a, 107., transl. by me. A.

P.). The poems analysed here, then, attempt to give voice to the *zoe* with the tools of poetry: that is, to give words to the landscape, the plant, the mineral – to everything that has no voice in a worldview constructed from the human perspective.

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The (Un)translatability of Metaphors
Motivical Function and Ambivalence of Meaning in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Golden Pot*

Lilla Lovizer[1]

Abstract

The Golden Pot, as Hoffmann's first and most artistical tale, has also been canonized as his literary ars poetica. Henceforth, the intertextual relationship which connects the work to the popular genres of education- and artist novels of the Goethe Era, especially to Novalis' experimental novel, *Henry von Ofterdingen,* is given as the authentic milieu of the interpretation. So far, according to literary reception viewing from this angle, *The Golden Pot* is regarded to be an education novel, as well as the "caricature of it", which consequently shows a complex reflection of Hoffmann's ironic-critical attitude towards the programme of the early German Romanticism. Therefore, the greatest challenge the translator must face, is to imply this ironic relation, which is expressed in multiple layers of linguistic metaphors and in various elements of the German text. The perception of metaphorical meanings and of poetical functions of these elements, i. e. their explications or implications as motifs have a defining value of the work's literary meaning. In my paper, using five different Hungarian editions of *The Golden Pot*, I would like to draw attention to some of the actual examples of these, yet unsolved translation and interpretation problems, which deprive the Hungarian readers of comprehending all the layers of the meaning in some parts of the text.

Keywords

German Romanticism, E. T. A. Hoffmann, *The Golden Pot*, Hungarian translations, linguistic metaphors, Hungarian learners, intertextuality

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𝕿*he Golden Pot*, as Hoffmann's first and most artistic tale, has also been canonized as his literary ars poetica (Lubkoll, and Harald 2015, 27–32). Hence, the intertextual relationship which connects the work to the popular genres of education and artist novels of the Goethe Era, especially to Novalis's experimental novel *Henry von Ofterdingen,* is given as the authentic milieu of interpretation. From this point of view, *The Golden Pot* was long regarded by literary criticism as a typical Romantic educational novel (Schmidt 2004), and only recently have analyses been published that interpret the work more as a caricature of the Romantic *Bildungsroman*, which consequently also reflects Hoffmann's ironical-critical attitude to the programme of early German Romanticism (Orosz 2007a, 178-182). The popularity of the work in Hungary is shown by the five different translations published in the last hundred years.[2] Nowadays, with the re-translation of classical works a popular literary enterprise, one might reasonably hope that the scholarly aspects will become more prominent and translators will place increasing emphasis on capturing as many layers of meaning in a work as possible. Regarding the literary context of the work mentioned above, one of the most arresting challenges the current and future translator must face is probably the question of how to imply this ironic relation. Since most of these references are expressed in multiple layers of linguistic metaphors, the perception of metaphorical meanings, and motivical functions related to these elements, has a determining influence on the work's literary meaning. The more of these motifs remain invisible the less the existence of the irony as a differentiating figure can be recognized by the reader.

1. Kümmeltürke vs. Childlike Poetic Character

The peculiar story of the student Anselmus begins on Ascension Day, when he unfortunately loses the money he had saved for the festive spree. In a glum mood, he lights his pipe in the spring sunset and, sitting by the bank of the Elbe, recollects all the misfortunes of his life, posing a rhetorical question to himself: "[…] ist es nicht ein schreckliches Verhängnis, daß ich, als ich denn doch nun dem Satan zum Trotz

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[2] The editions of the five Hungarian translations used for this essay are as follows: E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Az arany cserép*, trans. Mózes Gaál (Athaeneum, 1919).; E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Az arany virágcserép*, trans. Zoltán Horváth, in *E. T. A. Hoffmann: Válogatott novellák* (Európa Könyvkiadó, 1982, first published in 1959).; E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Aranycserép*, trans. György Szegő (Creangă Kiadó, 1972).; E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Az arany virágcserép*, trans. Ambrus Bor, in *E. T. A. Hoffmann: Az arany virágcserép / A homokember / Scuderi kisasszony* (Európa Diákkönyvtár, 1993).; E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Az arany virágcserép: Újkori mese,* trans. Géza Horváth, in *E. T. A. Hoffmann: Az arany virágcserép / A homokember / Scuderi kisasszony* (Európa Diákkönyvtár, 2007). In the following these editions will be referred to by the surname of their translator, the year of the publication, and page numbers.

Student geworden war, ein Kümmeltürke sein und bleiben mußte?" (Hoffmann 1981, 12) ["isn't it a terrible fate that after defying Satan by becoming a student, I must always be a complete duffer?" (Hoffmann 1992, 3)] Given the significance of the term Kümmeltürke, as the hero's linguistic self-identification immediately gives a complete conceptual background of understanding the work as a romantic *bildungsroman* – or perhaps as a caricature of one – its proper understanding seems to be a major issue. However, the word Kümmeltürke – as realia usually do – appears in various forms in Hungarian translations, which either understate the real meaning of the word ("Sanyarú Vendel" [Gaál 1919, 13]) or fail to define it completely ("nyárspolgár" [Horváth 1982, 25]; "egyetemi polgár, faszent állapotába jutva" [Szegő 1972, 10]; "hallei tuskó" [Bor 1993, 9]; "örökösen gúnyolódnak rajtam, mert az egyetem közelében lakom" [Horváth 2007, 10]).

The expression of Kümmeltürke originates from the city of Halle in the 17th century. At that time a large amount of cumin was growing in one part of the city, which is why this area was named Cuminturkey. Thus, the term Kümmeltürke (which could be rendered in English Cuminturk) originally refers to the citizens dwelling in that area. Its pejorative tinge was certainly taken for granted from the very beginning, as a label attached to the most everyday local patriots of Halle (Drosdowski 1983, 749). Later on, Kümmeltürke appeared in student slang as well, as a derisive epithet for those dull enough to have accommodation directly next to the university (Kluge 1899, 231). In this way, the meaning of Kümmeltürke spread until it became synonymous with the expression of "Philister" [Philistine], which counted as a proper swearword during Romanticism (Grimm and Grimm 1854, 2592). The original sense of Philister can be phrased as 'not a student anymore', meaning those who were already making their living in a civilian profession and no longer possessed the freedom of real student life. The second meaning of Philister, emerging during Romanticism, was the real lowbrow who showed indifference towards art or superior beauty and was only interested in utilitarian matters (Walzel 2003).

Apparently, the word Kümmeltürke gains a vital poetical function as long as it can be perceived that its inner form is being unfolded by the linguistic construction of Anselmus's story.[3] According to this interpretation, the Kümmeltürke*,* by its own historical semantics means the consecutive stages of his progress in civilian life. As such, at the beginning of the story, the expression Kümmeltürke must be meant in its first two senses combined. They correspond to the stages of the student's life, which

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[3] According to Potebnya's theory, the *inner form* of a word (that vivid image to which the word owes its poetic qualities) is directly linked to the word's earliest known etymological root, which has an indisputable conceptual purity. (Seifrid 2005)

have already been completed, causing him to regard himself as inevitably miserable. Serpentina, however, identifies this misfortune as "high simplicity of manners" and "a total want of what is called knowledge of the world" as a "childlike-poetic spirit" in the 8th Vigil.[4] It means that the second level of being a Kümmeltürke – as a metaphor of childlike poetic soul – gains a new sense connoting that "inward make of mind" (Hoffmann 1992, 56) which enabled Anselmus in the first place to understand the song of the little snakes, and to become worthy of Serpentina's love. Although this metaphor, which is also an explicit allusion to Novalis's *kindliches Gemüt* (a common metaphor for poetic genius in the Goethe Era as well) will, unless the historical semantics of Kümmeltürke are thoroughly expanded, definitely remain unnoticed by any foreign reader. For this reason, in translations it would be absolutely necessary to explain this expression in a footnote or endnote – as is usually done in many other cases (e.g. the names of characters).

According to the metaphor of childlike character/spirit, which originally comes from Schiller, Romanticism defines the child as a naturally complete creature (Schiller 1975, 45–48). That is why a poet with a childlike soul is capable of perceiving the entirety of the nature that surrounds him, and exploring its inner essential secrets. On this basis, the protagonist of Novalis's novel, set in the Medieval Ages, appears as a real chosen hero with all the blessings and ambitions of his mission. His childlike poetic character is no secret either, as his talent is naturally revealed in all his speeches and actions. However, Anselmus, placed by his author in the early 19th century, considers himself an ordinary Kümmeltürke constantly beset by misfortune. That is why his poetic character can only obstruct his owner's advance in civilian life – in a very similar way, moreover, as Schiller describes the features of the naive-poetical characters born into an artificial age.[5]

Novalis romanticised the Middle Ages as an era of collective religiosity and the most harmonious time of human history – largely contributing to the characteristic idealisation of the Middle Ages in early German Romanticism. Since the medieval plot of *Ofterdingen* is affected by the same mythopoetic perception of history (Orosz 2007b, 54–64), the poetic genius is naturally given an honoured position in the novel. The same idea, however, when transferred into the present, and no longer protected

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[4] "It is called a child-like poetic spirit. Such a spirit is often found in youths who are mocked by the rabble because of the lofty simplicity of their behaviour and because they lack what people call worldly manners." (Hoffmann 1992, 56)

[5] "Poets of this naïve category are no longer at home in an articifal age. They are indeed scarcely even possible, at least in no other wise possible except they run wild in their own age and are preserved by some favorable destiny from its crippling influence. From society itself they can never arise; but from outside it they still sometimes appear, but rather as strangers at whom one stares, and as uncouth sons of nature by whom one is irritated." (Schiller, 1967, 109–110.)

by the ennobling feature of the past, becomes relative and degraded. By transferring him into this new artificial age, when the childlike poetic character is often misapplied and is laughed at, Hoffmann deprives his hero of his safe background. Accordingly, the main difference between the childlike poetic characters of Henry and Anselmus is created by this very time shift, since the student – to his great misfortune – was born as a contemporary of his author. That is why his real talent may stay hidden not only from the world but also from himself, until he becomes capable of accepting a new self-identification as a result of loving Serpentina and believing in another level of truth.

According to the historical semantics and metaphorical connotation of Kümmeltürke outlined above, at the beginning of the story Anselmus faces the most significant turning point of his life. The question is whether the third stage of the original semantics of Kümmeltürke will be fulfilled, and Anselmus will be able to integrate into the philistine society, or – as a verification of Serpentina's metaphor – Anselmus' hidden talent is indeed that childlike poetic character which would drive him to achieve a higher state of his own existence and become a poet.

2. Dämmerung – A Passage to Atlantis

Atlantis, the magical realm of poetry, reveals itself to Anselmus in the first twilight of the story, just after he describes himself as a Kümmeltürke. Then, having a childlike poetic soul and falling in love with Serpentina, he starts to understand the sounds of nature; he hears the voices of the evening breeze, the sunrays and the flowers. The motif of twilight (Dämmerung) appears to have a significant metaphorical function in the work, signalling the opening of the passage between the transcendent and the immanent spheres of the story. In other words, the term of Dämmerung, as a linguistic unit, is a permanent feature of the passage to Atlantis, and as such the poetical leitmotif of the work. As a transitional state between day and night, waking and dreaming, twilight (Dämmerung) is precisely the fleeting, and in fact very colourful, interval of time in which the two worlds can meet. The boundaries between the immanent and transcendent spheres are blurred, and the miracle of a higher existence (which only true love can evoke) suddenly emerges from behind reality.

Giving the base of the expression, the verb dämmern can refer to the changing light at dusk or dawn, as well as 'wondering' or 'being half asleep'. Therefore, the word Dämmerung refers not only to the external world but also to a subject

perceiving the world with his or her own senses: this complex meaning is where the metaphorical status of the expression comes from. In the text of *The Golden Pot*, there are three special twilights described with this same expression; in other cases, completely different linguistic forms can be found meaning the same light conditions (e.g. Abendsonne, ziemlich finster, im tiefen Dunkel, etc.). The first twilight (Dämmerung) of the work is the above-mentioned sunset, when Anselmus falls in love with Serpentina and glimpses an insight into the realm of Atlantis. The second twilight (Dämmerung) comes in the 4th Vigil when the student can finally pour out his soul to Lindhorst, who once again conjures Serpentina with the help of his magic ring. The third and last twilight (Dämmerung) comes in the 9th Vigil, where Anselmus falls for Veronica's temptation. The ominous twilight has deepened into full darkness by the time Anselmus, Heerbrand and Conrector Paulmann finish their coffees and transform into a real "punch company". However, in order to unfold the metaphorical meaning of these fragments, we must first understand the function of these twilights in the *Ofterdingen*.

Novalis uses the term Dämmerung a total of six times in his own novel, to denote dawn as well evening twilight. What is particularly noteworthy is that the term itself always appears twice in the text describing the events of the very same sunrise or sunset, and these events have a fundamental poetic significance. The first Dämmerung pair comes at the point when the dreamy appearance of the blue flower is described;[6] when the *longing* after the flower and for a higher level of knowledge is born in Henry's soul (*Sehnsucht*). The second pair stand as a symbolic term for the Middle Ages, and as such, mean that in-between state of existence in which Henry starts searching for the blue flower (*Suchen*). The last pair come in the Atlantis tale, presenting the finding and fulfilment of true love (*Vereinigung*) (Novalis 1982). The fruit of the princess and the young man's love is the child, obviously the symbol of poesy, with whom they can appear before the king of Atlantis. The young man wins the contest of the minstrels and the king welcomes him as his own son – thus the spiritual and physical parts of the tale reunite in perfect harmony. In other words, these three pairs of Dämmerungs condense the plot of the first part of the novel, which is the symbolic journey of becoming a poet. Provided that Anselmus's story is in fact an intertextual retelling of Henry's, the Novalis-based explanation of the Dämmerungs by Hoffmann leads to a different result.

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[6] The Blue Flower is known as a major motif in Novalis's transcendental poetry, mainly as the symbol of love and poesy. Furthermore, as a plant, it also symbolizes the passage between the two worlds *(Sein – Dasein)*, and linking these with the former two, the Blue Flower means the transcendent realm of perfect harmony, or even Atlantis itself. (Pikulik, 2000, 219–226.)

Similarly to Novalis, Hoffmann starts using the term Dämmerung in pairs (i.e. the word shows up always twice in the text, while describing the events of the very same twilight) however, in *The Golden Pot* it refers strictly to sunsets.

While the first Dämmerung denotes the possibility of contacting Atlantis, the second one indicates the successful outcome of the connection. The border between the immanent and the transcendent spheres becomes blurred, and suddenly a higher level of reality emerges – which can only be developed by true love. These first Dämmerung-pair describe the twilight on the riverbank, during which Anselmus falls in love with Serpentina and gains an insight into the realm of Atlantis. The vision dissolves with the last vanishing rays of sun; however, the longing after its magic lingers on painfully in the student's soul (*Sehnsucht*) (Hoffmann 1981, 11–17). The second Dämmerung pair come in the 4th Vigil, when Anselmus can finally open his heart to Lindhorst, who visualizes Serpentina again using his magic ring, and reveals the meaning of the boy's vision. As a result, Anselmus decides to start copying the manuscripts of the Archivarius the very next day, which is also a parallel activity to the *Suchen* by Novalis (Hoffmann 1981, 51–52). The subversion, as expected, comes in the third, single standing Dämmerung, when on the one hand, Anselmus is not where he should be, and on the other, he lets himself be seduced by Veronica. The enjoyable consumption of the coffee, with its dark colour and its metal pot (through which the crone has appeared elsewhere) clearly shows that the dark forces have taken control over Anselmus even before the twilight (Dämmerung) falls (Hoffmann 1981, 108–109). Obviously, that is why this Dämmerung stands without a pair, and accordingly, as a motif, it cannot fulfil its original function either. Anselmus becomes conflicted in terms of his faith towards Serpentina, and his dreams become limited by the most everyday values.

That is why he cannot find the other world, although it should happen here and now, as was the function of the third Dämmerung pair in Novalis's novel. In other words, the Dämmerung motif is turned upside down in *The Golden Pot*, as the third twilight ends in the fulfilment of the hero's worldly fate, and as a result, Anselmus reaches the final meaning-stage of Kümmeltürke. As a result, the very next day he arrives to do his copy work as a proper philistine, who cannot see the wonders of Lindhorst's house, and drops an ink blot on the outspread original. At this point Anselmus seems to exhaust his own potential and his failure as an artist becomes complete. That is why the primal dilemma generated by the ambivalence in the meaning of Kümmeltürke can only be solved by locking him into the crystal bottle, which means that the metaphorical status of the term would be restored in

an ironic-magical way. The childlike poetic character can attain to a higher state of existence (i.e. become a poet) only unknowingly, through the external, artificial help of Lindhorst.

Consequently, from this time on, Kümmeltürke is not only a metaphor for the childlike poetic character, borrowed from Novalis, but its ironic resemantization as well, which moreover develops through the distortion of another well-known motif of Novalis's poetical discourse.[7] Regrettably none of our translators applies a standardized expression with reference to the *Dämmerung*s: "mélyedő alkony", "alkony könnyű habja", "késő homály", "sűrű alkony homálya", "leszállt az alkony" (Gaál 1919, 13; 16; 38; 79); "mély homály", "alkony", "leszálló esthomály", "alkonyat", "be is alkonyodott" (Horváth 1982, 24; 27; 46; 79); "a messzeség sűrűsödő köde", "alkonyat", "erősen bealkonyodott", "homály", "beállt az alkonyat" (Szegő 1972, 9; 14; 43; 44; 96); "homály", "alkony", "sűrű esthomály", "alkonyhomály", "alkonyra hajlott az idő" (Bor 1993, 9; 12; 36; 78); "mély alkony", "alkonyat", "sötét szürkület", "szürkület", "bealkonyodott" (Horváth 2007, 10; 14; 41; 42; 83.), although in my opinion it would not be impossible to find an equally apt Hungarian term (e.g. "alkonyi derengés" or "derengő félhomály") and use it consistently. As a result, the unique cases in which the linguistical description of a sunset is at the narrative level also a story-forming motif (i.e. marking a stage of the journey to Atlantis) are not at all distinguished from simple sunsets of the Hungarian translations published so far.

3. Atlantis as Böhmerlande?

The magic realm of Atlantis manifests itself for Anselmus during that twilight (Dämmerung) when, in his suddenly born love towards Serpentina, he experiences perfect natural harmony. In this momentary idyll he can hear the voices of the elder bush and the evening breeze and understand the song of the flowers' scent (*natura loquitur*). This description perfectly matches Novalis's *Golden Age Theory*, which means an "ancient state of harmony", when the magical power of words was still known for both the living and the dead elements of the world (Sata 2002). This recollection of the old earthly *Golden Age* appears in the first, Herodotus-based tale of the *Ofterdingen*, in the story of Airon. The second tale about Atlantis, as mentioned

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[7] In Novalis's poem *Der Himmel war umzogen*, not only does a golden-green snake appear in the same symbolic function as Serpentina, but the poem creates the impression that the first *Dämmerung* scene of *The Golden Pot* was "the love-seasoned prosaic rewrite" of it. Gardiner's interpretation draws attention to those fundamental symbols (*Dämmerung, Erfüllung der Sehnsucht, Erkenntniss durch Vereinigung*) which are the constant elements of Novalis's poetry, as well as his religious and natural philosophy, and the figure of the snake is connected to the Loved One. (Uerlings, 1991, 328)

before, represents the symbolic means of becoming a poet. The tale of Klingsohr in the 9th Vigil (combining the biblical world of John's Revelations, Nordic Mythology and Jacob Böhme's mystical theology) indicates the forthcoming revival of the *Golden Age* of Atlantis, which would have been recreated by concluding the ever-increasing levels of the plot and from the magic of Henry's poetry. Through this, Novalis' turns the original mythologem into a tale, making up a new plot with utopian contents and following the triadic structure (harmony – disruption of harmony – restoration of harmony) typical of him (Orosz 2007a, 174–178).

In *The Golden Pot* there is no such allegorical correspondence between the particular layers of the narrative. The intradiegetic tales[8] are the subsequent parts of the very same *fabula*, according to which the original mythologem of Atlantis is resemanticised by the same triadic structure, but with a very colourful and unusual *sujet*. No wonder that the interpretation of this new Myth of Atlantis created by Hoffmann is still an open discussion in the critical literature (Kraus 2014, 70–73).

My hypothesis is that the Myth of Atlantis in *The Golden Pot* has a same intertextual relationship with Novalis as does the main story, but that as far as his theory of transcendence is concerned, Novalis himself was heavily inspired by another well-known author.[9] Besides leaving a perceptible mark on Novalis's writings, the mystic depth of Jacob Böhme's theosophy influenced various other representatives of early German Romanticism.[10] As an element in contemporary literary fashion, the mysticism of Jacob Böhme was also well known to Hoffmann (Holzhausen 1988). As such, it seems legitimate to presume that Hoffmann is also likely to have used some thesis of Böhme's mysticism by creating his own fantasy world (of Atlantis).

This theory may be supported by the first implicit appearance of Atlantis in the text, together with the twilight (Dämmerung) on the banks of the Elbe: "aus tiefer Dämmerung gaben die zackichten Gebirge Kunde vom fernen Böhmerlande" (Hoffmann 1981, 13) ["and the jagged peaks half-hidden by twilight announced the far land of Bohemia" (Hoffmann 1992, 3)]. In this context ("aus tiefer Dämmerung", "half-hidden by twilight"), the term Böhmerlande is primarily identified as a

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[8] A second level of narration inside the main narrative; when the narration itself becomes part of the narrative. (Genette 1983, 212–262)

[9] "Novalis praised Böhme as a poet or, more specifically, as a writer who presented an inspired, poetic view of nature. In this connection it is significant that Böhme was the one speculative mystic whose work Novalis knew at first hand. […] From this premise, Paschek derived two others: as a poet, Böhme provided Novalis with a favourable alternative to Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, and also with a model for his Heinrich von Ofterdingen." (Mayer 1999, 76–95)

[10] "Among the lunacies of the romantic school in Germany, their incessant praise and glorification of Jacob Böhme merits special notice. This name was the shibboleth, as it were, of the school. When they pronounced the name of Jacob Böhme they put on their most solemn and reverential look. Were they in earnest or in jest?" (Heine, 1882, 117)

metaphor for the fantastic realm of Atlantis, but as a linguistic metaphor, it also refers the land of Böhme's mysticism. Another piece of circumstantial evidence of Böhme's influence on the text can be found in the 3rd Vigil, when Lindhorst (archivist in this world, and a fiery salamander in the other) tells the cosmogonic story of Atlantis and at the end of it states to his audience nothing less than: "aber es ist dessen unerachtet nichts weniger als ungereimt oder auch nur allegorisch gemeint, sondern buchstäblich wahr" (Hoffmann 1981, 36) ["nevertheless, it is very far from absurd or even allegorical, but literally true" (Hoffmann 1992, 17)]. The expression of buchstäblich Wahrheit ("literal truth") is also a prominent reference to Böhme's well-known concept about the unquestionability of the mystical truth (Gauger 2000, 33–34). The critical literature has not yet reached a consensus on either Böhme's formal education or his literacy apart from the Bible, with special regard to the fact that he did not understand Latin (Helferich 1992, 150). The only author known to have been read by Böhme is Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim, or Paracelsus, who had identified the salamander as the element of fire.[11]

Since, however, Böhmerlande is usually translated as a simple, geographical name, these clues leading to Böhme regrettably remain invisible in the Hungarian editions. That is why the mysticism of Böhme does not even come up during the interpretation, although the mystical-biblical symbols (e.g. the Lily, the Dragon or the Morning Star) known from his theory of the Revival in the Holy Spirit (Böhme 1846, 116–237), along with his Creation Concept written in his *Mysterium Pansophicum* (Böhme 1920) do provide an excellent theoretical basis for the ironic, fairy-tale-like resemantisation of the Myth of Atlantis (Lovizer 2019).

4. Conclusion

"All literature is imitation" (Szerb 2002, 133), or at least reflection. This is why, in the case of works with an obvious ars poetical meaning, foreign translations must also be able to show at least the most relevant literary tradition in relation to which these works (and their authors) define themselves, especially if the works themselves also explicitly aim to do so. As the above examples taken from the Hungarian translations show, many of those references by which *The Golden Pot* could be interpreted in its intertextual relation to contemporary Romanticism remain

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[11] The theme of the conflict between humanity and nature, which became a popular topic during the Romanticism, appears first in the tale *Udine* written by Fouqué, whose source was also the pneumatology of Paracelsus. (Gallagher, 2009, 352) About the common linkage between Böhme and the figure of the salamander see the epigram written by Angelius Silesius (Kemper, 2010, 209).

invisible. This means that one of the most original intentions of the work has also remained hidden from Hungarian readers, and the possibility of the ironic reading mentioned in the introduction, and granted in the German original, is considerably limited. A careful analysis of these motifs borrowed from the *Ofterdingen* clearly proves that Hoffmann, in the fictional character and verbality of Anselmus, is in fact parodying the protagonist of Novalis's novel. The target, however, is not only his hero, but the whole mystical-syncretic enthusiasm of early German Romanticism, along with its rhetoric, and the solemn remedial epistemology of Novalis's tales. Consequently, *The Golden Pot*, as a parody of Novalis's concept of novel and tale, also takes a certain distance from this kind of utopic universalized genre of artistical tales (*Kunstmärchen*). The best example for this attitude is the admitted connection between the two works, the mythologem of Atlantis, which can be identified in both as a unique form of the Arcadian topos. Even though, while the Novalis tale restores the long-lost harmonic state of the world in his utopic fiction of Atlantis, *The Golden Pot's* Atlantis will be resemantisized by the sceptical-ironic transcription of the romantic idea of the *Golden Age* as a fully separated fantasy world (Böhmerlände) (Mayer, 2000).

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Hungarian EFL Learners' Perception of Intrusive R in English

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Abstract

This study investigates the perception of Intrusive R among Hungarian learners of English. 24 participants performed an AX discrimination task focusing on sentence pairs with and without Intrusive R. Of 264 instances of detectable Intrusive Rs, participants accurately identified 58 (21.97%), and in 78 other cases (29.55%) they managed to find the difference but could only identify it indirectly. Factors influencing perception included the presence of another /r/ near the intrusive one and the order of the sentences in the perception task.

Keywords

Intrusive R, R-liaison, R-sandhi, Hungarian learners, EFL, perception.

1. Introduction[3]

Intrusive R, as in *law(r)and order, Shah(r)Excellence, Hosanna(r)in the highest*, etc., is a hiatus filler (i.e., a consonant inserted between two vowels, like in *Ady(j)Endre* in Hungarian) found in certain accents of English. It is not among the features of English pronunciation that an average Hungarian learner of the language will be familiar with. The reasons for this might be that Intrusive R is characteristic of a limited number of pronunciation varieties of English (the so-called non-rhotic ones), and that, due to the rare occurrence of the phonological environment in which it may appear, it is extremely rare even in

those accents of the language which display this feature. Consequently, Intrusive R is not usually mentioned in English as a foreign language (EFL) coursebooks, even in those which contain exercises focusing explicitly on pronunciation (e.g., the *English File* series). Understandably, pronunciation activities found in coursebooks devote more attention to issues such as stress placement or sound contrasts, which contribute more substantially to learners' intelligibility, unlike the awareness or the production of Intrusive R.

For Hungarian learners of English, the first opportunity to learn about Intrusive R typically arises at university level, during their first course in English phonetics and/or phonology as part of a BA programme in English Studies, which includes a comprehensive overview of English pronunciation features. Based on the experience of university lecturers, including ourselves, who teach introductory courses in phonetics and phonology, not until being explicitly taught about Intrusive R can students even *notice* that it exists, regardless of the extent to which they have been exposed to a pronunciation variety of English displaying Intrusive R. What is more, learners' realisation of the feature often amuses them in a way that, interestingly, no other "un-Hungarian" characteristic feature of English pronunciation does – for some reason, learners do not seem to get as enthusiastic about interdental fricatives (commonly called "TH-sounds"), dark-Ls, or aspirated stops (to mention just a few other pronunciation features of English that are not attested in Hungarian) as about Intrusive R.

Students' apparent fascination with Intrusive R is especially intriguing given that hiatus filling is not unknown to Hungarians: Hungarian resolves certain hiatuses via the insertion of a /j/ sound (Siptár and Törkenczy 2000, 91), such as in *Frédi(j) és Béni* 'The Flintstones', *rádi(j)ó* 'radio', etc. Although English uses more consonants to resolve hiatuses than Hungarian does (in addition to /j/ and /r/, /w/ also occurs as a hiatus filler, as in *you(w)and me*), the phenomenon of hiatus filling happens to be a part of the little (Hungarian) phonetics/phonology that is represented in school curricula. Therefore, Hungarian learners are supposed to have some explicit knowledge of such phenomena.

It seems that the popular appeal of Intrusive R is not coupled with ease of acquisition. It has been shown that the accents of highly advanced learners of English, who start out from a fully rhotic accent and decide to acquire non-rhoticity, may display R-dropping but no Linking- or Intrusive R at an intermediate stage in the process, as the latter features seem to develop later (Piukovics and Balogné Bérces 2019). Furthermore, it is not just the production of Intrusive R that

poses challenges; perception difficulties also arise. Experience from teaching the beginners' phonetics and phonology course mentioned above indicates that even after learning about the feature, some learners fail to hear Intrusive Rs in samples where they know there should be some, such as in listening exercises focusing on Intrusive R. This paper aims to address the difficulties learners have with the perception of Intrusive R – specifically, it aims to gain a deeper understanding of learners' lack of ability to notice Intrusive Rs unless they are aware of its existence, and to explore what factors might influence their perception.

2. Intrusive R and experiments on R-liaison

Intrusive R is characteristic of the so-called non-rhotic accents of English (such as the southern British standard), in which /r/s are only pronounced prevocalically, unlike in rhotic accents (such as the American standard), where all orthographic <r>s appear in pronunciation. Thus, in non-rhotic accents, the /r/ is pronounced in words like *rabbit* and *parrot*, but not in *bird*, *bore*, *far*, *summer*, etc. (though, as reflected in their spelling, historically these words also contained an /r/, which is why the phenomenon is traditionally called R-dropping). In connected speech, word-final, otherwise unpronounced /r/s may be reintroduced if a vowel-initial morpheme follows, giving rise to what are referred to as Linking-Rs (e.g., in *boring*, *far away* or *summer evening*). Such intervocalic /r/s on morpheme boundaries may also occur even in cases where historically there was no /r/ present: this is what is called Intrusive R, which, as its name suggests, is traditionally analysed as a rule of R-insertion occurring after the non-high vowels (/ɔː/, /ɑː/, /ɜː/ and /ə/). Table 1 lists a few examples.

Trigger vowel	Examples
/ɔː/	*law(r)and order, draw(r)ing*
/ɑː/	*Shah(r)Excellence, baa(r)ing*
/ɜː/	*cordon bleu(r)is delicious*
/ə/ (including schwa-final diphthongs)	*Hosanna(r)in the highest, rumba(r)ing, the idea(r)is that…, yeah(r)I do*

Table 1

On the other hand, some contemporary analyses, which take into consideration native English speakers' phonological knowledge, argue that no deletion happens in words like *bird* or the citation form of *bore*, as no /r/ is present in the underlying forms of such words. For these analyses, there is no difference between Linking-R and Intrusive R, as both occur after the same set of vowels, and are equally present in the speakers' underlying representations. Therefore, what is traditionally called R-dropping is rather regarded as a phonotactic restriction that only allows /r/s in syllable onsets (e.g., Harris 1994), and Linking-R and Intrusive R are both analysed as instances of consonant insertion (e.g., Nespor and Vogel 1986).

For our purposes, however, the traditional analysis of the phenomenon has to be adopted. Namely, we maintain that words like *bird* and *bore* undergo R-dropping; that Intrusive R is to be distinguished from Linking-R as it does not appear in spelling; and that the appearance of Intrusive R (and not that of Linking-R) is to be analysed as a consonant insertion rule. As the participants of our study (see Section 3.1) are non-native speakers learning English as a *foreign* language (and not a *second* language), with more exposure to written than to spoken English (Szpyra-Kozłowska 2005, 37), we can assume that they are heavily influenced by spelling, and this is why the historical difference between the two types of R-liaison or R-sandhi needs to be retained.

These discussions have contributed to the extensive coverage of R-liaison in academic discourse; however, empirical research on any aspect of R-liaison remains limited. Most of the few empirical studies touching upon Intrusive R have examined native English pronunciation varieties (e.g., Mompeán-Gonzalez and Mompeán-Guillamón 2009). Research involving non-native participants has typically focused on the broader acquisition of non-rhoticity, i.e., R-liaison as a whole, including the R-dropping rule and Linking-R, without specifically examining Intrusive R (Piukovics 2018, Piukovics and Balogné Bérces 2019). The studies have examined the process of acquiring categorical non-rhoticity by advanced-level Hungarian speakers of English who started out from speaking a fully rhotic accent of English, and gradually switched to non-rhoticity by suppressing previously pronounced /r/s. The studies have concluded that the reintroduction of Linking-Rs and the appearance of Intrusive Rs happen at a later, more advanced stage of the acquisition process, since R-liaison was not attested in the intermediate stage which the participants' accents were at.

Other studies, such as Tuinman, Mitterer, and Cutler (2011), have explored the phonetic characteristics of the Intrusive R, highlighting subtle acoustic differences

between historical onset /r/ and Intrusive R (e.g., *extra rice* vs. *extra(r)ice*), though the Dutch learners involved in a perception part of the study did not perceive the differences that were acoustically detectable. Additionally, Uzair, Mahmood, and Khan (2015) have demonstrated that explicit instruction on R-liaison, including Intrusive R, can significantly improve non-native speakers' listening skills, highlighting the educational benefit of teaching these features. These findings support the advice to learners of English given by Nádasdy (2006), who claims that non-native speakers of English need not be able to produce Intrusive R, but being aware of its existence may help them avoid misunderstandings such as *vanilla rice* for *vanilla ice* (93).

As can be seen, studies on R-sandhi or Intrusive R in particular have barely touched upon non-native speakers' perception of the phenomenon, and at the time of writing this paper, we are not aware of any experiments on how those non-native speakers who possess no explicit knowledge of Intrusive R perceive the feature. In the case of Hungarian speakers, who, as mentioned in Section 1, only encounter explicit explanations of R-liaison at academic levels of English studies (and thus reach a high level of proficiency in English without learning about Intrusive R), such an experiment could provide valuable data for a deeper understanding of the learning process. It is this gap that our paper intends to fill by seeking answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent are Hungarian learners of English able to notice the presence of Intrusive R if they are unaware of its existence?
2. In what ways do the background variables of lexical bias, vowel quality, the presence of another R nearby and the order of the stimuli determine Hungarian learners' perception of Intrusive R?
3. How do Hungarian learners of English describe their perception of Intrusive R when they have no explicit knowledge about this feature?

3. Research design

3.1. Participants

The study involved 26 participants, recruited through criterion and snowball sampling. Recruitment was terminated upon reaching data saturation in the qualitative part of the data collection (see Section 3.2), when no new themes emerged in the students' answers. The informants selected to participate in the experiment had to meet the following criteria:

- they were native speakers of Hungarian;
- they spoke English at least at an intermediate level;
- they were not exposed to multiple languages during the Critical Period (i.e., before puberty);
- they had never lived abroad;
- they had not been taught English by a native speaker of the language;
- and they had never studied English phonetics or phonology.

These criteria ruled out the possibility of some participants having exceptional hearing due to bilingualism, and ensured that none possessed explicit knowledge of Intrusive R – ideally, they were not even supposed to be aware of its existence. Of the 26 participants, two (Participants 4 and 17) were excluded from the analysis because their responses indicated some knowledge of Intrusive R. E.g., Participant 4 wrote that "at the end of the word 'saw' in the first sentence, there was a slight 'r' sound (as far as I know, this has something to do with British accents)". Therefore, the data analysed came from 24 informants.

3.2. The data collection instrument and the variables examined

The data collection instrument used in the experiment was an AX discrimination ("same or different") task. In this task, participants listen to pairs of audio stimuli and have to decide whether the two examples they heard were the same or different. The recordings used in the experiment included 17 pre-recorded sentence pairs (listed in the Appendix). The sentences were read out by a native speaker of English whose accent features Intrusive R, but who is also conscious of this feature enough to be able to control whether or not to actually pronounce an Intrusive R where possible. This native speaker was asked to read each sentence twice: once with and once without Intrusive R, ensuring there were no differences in other parts of the sentence.

In the case of 11 out of the 17 sentence pairs, the difference between the two sentences was the presence or absence of an Intrusive R. The remaining examples were either the same recording played twice or distractors – the latter involved other differences between the sentences, such as a geminate vs. a short consonant or different qualities of an R sound. Although more sentences could have provided us with more accurate results, we deliberately limited the number of sentences to avoid

participants recognising the recurring difference of the presence or absence of an /r/ sound, which could have influenced their perception.

The words in the sentences used in the experiment after which the Intrusive Rs occurred (henceforth referred to as "trigger words") were carefully selected to examine the effect of specific variables on the participants' perception. The experiment was exploratory in nature, therefore no hypotheses were tested; however, certain expectations about the results guided the choice of the variables investigated. Namely, the following variables were considered in our study:

- Lexical bias: Lexical bias in the field of pronunciation acquisition refers to the fact that substitution errors (such as /s/ for /θ/ or /v/ for /w/ by Hungarian speakers of English) occur more frequently in existing words than in nonwords (Costa, Roelstraete, and Hartsuiker 2006). Although at the time of writing this paper we are not aware of studies which directly explored perception errors (mishearings) along the word/nonword distinction, the effect of lexical bias has been shown in areas beyond speech production, such as comprehension monitoring (Severens and Hartsuiker 2009). To test whether participants' perception of Intrusive R is influenced by word familiarity, our instrument included sentences in which all lexical content words were nonwords (e.g., *She jicked the pimma in the jave*) as well as ones involving existing words (e.g., *I was scared when I saw a dog*). Based the lexical bias effect, we expected learners to notice more /r/s in sentences with nonwords than in those with familiar words.

- Quality of the vowel preceding the Intrusive R: As shown in Table 1, Intrusive R occurs after the non-high vowels. This variable was considered to see if participants noticed Intrusive Rs more easily after certain vowels than others.

- Presence of another /r/ sound near the intrusive one: This variable was included to explore whether it affects the perception of Intrusive R if there is another /r/ sound near the intrusive one (such as in the examples *His came__r__a(r)and his tablet are there* and *It's easy to d__r__aw(r)a cat* – the /r/s near the intrusive one are highlighted in boldfaced underlined). Specifically, we tested whether auditory masking occurs, whereby the perception of a sound (in this case, the Intrusive R) is influenced by the presence of another (in this case, the "expected" /r/) (Gelfand 2004).

- The order of the sentences: In the AX discrimination task, the sentence containing the Intrusive R alternated between the first and the second

position in a pair. With this we aimed to investigate whether it was easier to detect the /r/ if it was in the first or the second sentence. According to the concept of priming (Bargh and Chartrand 2014), the first sentence in a perception task like ours could function as a priming stimulus, and the second as the target stimulus, the latter drawing more attention. Furthermore, the recency effect (according to which recent information, e.g., the last few items in a list, are more easily recalled; see Baddeley and Hitch 1993), suggests that participants may have forgotten the first sentence by the time the second one played. Based on these, we expected that the presence of an /r/ in the second sentence would be easier to detect than its absence. (As this last variable is language-external, it did not affect the selection of words for the sentences in the instrument.)

In summary, we anticipated that it would be easier to notice an /r/ under the following conditions:

- In sentences with nonwords, due to the nature of the lexical bias effect;
- If it occurs in the second sentence, due to priming and the recency effect.
- If there was no other /r/ nearby, due to auditory masking.

The fourth variable, vowel quality, was included for exploratory purposes: we wanted to see whether, e.g., the acoustic properties wherein the vowels differ could make a following /r/ more noticeable.

The participants performed the discrimination task individually and without supervision. This approach allowed for the inclusion of more participants and helped minimise the Hawthorne effect (Dörnyei 2007) or observer's paradox (Labov 1972), which states that participants may alter their behaviour when they are aware of being observed. Each informant received a link to an online platform (https://testmoz.com/) and a set of instructions, which they were asked to read carefully before starting the experiment. The instructions first reminded the informants to participate only if they met each of the criteria described in Section 3.1. A description of the task followed: participants were to indicate whether they heard any difference between the sentences in each pair, and, if so, to explain what the difference was. They were asked to complete the task in a quiet environment (free from distractions for 10–15 minutes), and to use headphones or earphones to listen to the recordings. They were also instructed to listen to each stimulus only once. The experiment

began with two trial rounds, where sample answers were provided to demonstrate the expected level of detail in their explanations.

3.3. Methods of data analysis

Data were stored in MS Excel, where the binary responses provided by the participants in the AX discrimination test were recorded. The spreadsheet also contained the values of the variables examined. For analysis, we reviewed each variable and counted the instances of its values within the dataset, then calculated how many of those instances were correctly identified by the participants. Table 2 summarises the total instances belonging to each value of the variables.

Variable	Values	Instances
lexical bias	existing words	144
	nonwords	120
vowel quality[4]	/ɔː/	96
	/ɑː/	72
	/ə/	96
another /r/ nearby	yes	144
	no	120
order	/r/ in the 1st sentence	144
	/r/ in the 2nd sentence	120

Table 2

The data obtained from this study did not allow for the use of inferential statistics, nor was this our objective – our aim was to conduct a preliminary examination of the variables, with the results serving as a foundation for designing a larger-scale quantitative experiment to accurately test the real effect of these variables. Therefore, we employed descriptive statistics in the analysis. Participants' qualitative responses were analysed using thematic content analysis (Xu and Zammit 2020), which involved reviewing the explanations to identify common themes and patterns in the responses.

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[4] The vowel /ɜː/ is missing from the table because it was not included in the stimuli due to the rare occurrence of trigger words ending in this vowel. Examples are limited to a few French loanwords such as *milieu* or *(cordon) bleu*.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Intrusive R perception

The experiment involved a total of 264 instances of detectable Intrusive Rs, of which 58 (21.97%) were both noticed and correctly described by the participants as an /r/ (i.e., the participants were able to point out that the difference between the two versions of the sentence in the AX discrimination task was that in one of them there was an extra /r/ sound). Additionally, in the case of 78 instances (29.55%), the participants *did* perceive a difference in the sentence containing the Intrusive R, but were unable to provide a precise description of the difference they observed. In what follows, we will merge these two categories (clear and marginal instances) in our analysis and regard them as "found" differences, considering the fact that the learners possessed no explicit knowledge of what Intrusive R was, and the aim was to see if they noticed the difference at all, even if they could not pinpoint accurately what it was. The participants' misperceptions will be discussed in Section 4.3.

In the remaining 128 cases (48.48%), the participants either indicated that the two sentences they listened to were the same, or pointed out a difference in a part of the sentence other than where the Intrusive R was. Thus, the overall detection rate was 51.52%.

4.2. The variables examined

Of the variables examined, we did not observe the anticipated influence of lexical bias – detection rates were similar for existing words and nonsense words (50% for the former and 52.33% for the latter). This indicates that word familiarity did not affect participants' ability to detect Intrusive Rs, contrary to what was expected based on how the lexical bias effect operates.

The presence of another /r/ sound near the intrusive one and the order of the sentences affected the participants' perception in the way we anticipated. The informants were more able to notice an Intrusive R when it was not near another /r/ sound, with a 60% detection rate with no other /r/, compared to 44.44% when there was another /r/ nearby. This suggests that two /r/ sounds, of which one is "unexpected", are difficult for learners to notice; the "expected" /r/ *did* mask the presence of the Intrusive R.

Similarly, the order of the sentences influenced detection as expected, with Intrusive Rs being more easily noticed when they appeared in the second sentence of the pair (63.33%) rather than when they were in the first one (41.67%). This result

aligns with the priming and recency effects discussed in Section 3.2, as participants may have been more focused on the second sentence, allowing them to notice an Intrusive R there more clearly. This finding raises the issue that the order of the sentences could be considered in the instrument design, rather than being a variable to examine – we will discuss this in Section 5.

Finally, Intrusive Rs were more frequently detected following /ə/ and /ɑː/ (63.54% and 61.11%, respectively), compared to /ɔː/ (32.29%). The reason why Intrusive Rs were the most difficult to notice after /ɔː/ may be that the articulatory-acoustic distance between /ɔː/ (the least non-high of the trigger vowels) and /r/ is the smallest, as both are close and rounded. Especially compared to open-unrounded /ɑː/, the detection of /r/s after /ɔː/ may have been more difficult. However, perceptual salience due to stress may have interacted with vowel quality, influencing the results. Therefore, in future iterations of this study, including a follow-up with a revised design, we plan to examine the vowel *following* the Intrusive R as well, as this would allow for an analysis of how the /r/ being in the onset a stressed or unstressed syllable may affect perception.

4.3. Describing the differences

In this subsection, we examine the 78 instances in which the participants noticed the difference between the two versions of the sentence but could not specifically identify the presence of an extra /r/ sound. In their descriptions of the differences, the following themes were identified: pointing out differences in clarity (37+13 instances), associations with different words (11+7 instances), perceiving a Hungarian /ø/ (7 instances), and perceiving a consonant other than /r/ (3 instances).

Let us explore these themes in more detail. The majority of the participants highlighted differences in clarity or emphasis: in 37 cases, they noted that the sentence without the Intrusive R was more clearly articulated because the words were emphasised or separated. Some examples of their observations include: "in the second sentence, the end of the word 'pizza' merges with the following conjunction", (Participant 3); "the words 'hepra' and 'and' were separated better in the second sentence" (Participant 18); "in the second sentence, a little pause was audible after 'draw'" (Participant 3). In these instances, the participants did not mention an extra sound; they only noticed the difference between the sentences indirectly. These observations are likely to stem from the fact that the stimulus provider, whose natural accent of English displays Intrusive R, had to consciously

avoid hiatus filling, thus isolating the words by a very brief pause in one version of the sentence. This isolation may have made the sentences more easily understandable to the participants.

13 participants also referred to issues with clarity, but from a different perspective: they described one sentence as being articulated carelessly by the stimulus provider. They mentioned that the reader did not pronounce a word "properly", either omitting the final syllable or the last few sounds. Such remarks were mostly (though not always) made about sentences with no Intrusive R. E.g.: "the ending of the word 'pimma' was closed more strongly in the second sentence, while in the first one the speaker just deleted the end of the word" (Participant 3 – the /r/ was in the 2nd sentence in this case); "in the first sentence, the part 'ra' was not pronounced normally in the word 'hepra'" (Participant 8) – in this case, the Intrusive R was in the second sentence, so the participant is likely to have thought that "hepra" was actually "heprar", and the form with the extra /r/ was how the word was to be pronounced "normally".

In 11 instances, participants explained the difference between the sentences by identifying a particular word as different. Examples include "saw a dog" vs. "saw her dog" (Participant 5); "pizza or spaghetti" vs. "pizza roll spaghetti" (Participant 5), "draw" vs. "drawer" (Participant 6), etc. These participants heard an extra /r/ sound in one sentence, but explained its presence at the lexical rather than phonological level, associating it with another word containing an /r/ that fitted the sentence semantically (though not always perfectly). A similar phenomenon occurred with nonsense words: in seven such cases, without existing words to associate with, participants created a nonword that matched their perception. For instance: "it sounded as if 'hepra' was 'hepura' or 'hepurer' in one case (I don't know the word)" (Participant 5); "I heard the word 'hepra' in the first sentence pronounced as 'hepra', and as 'hepör' in the second one" (Participant 2). As seen from the examples, these misperceptions occurred in nonsense words containing a non-intrusive /r/ and involved either adding an extra /r/ to a word ("hepurer") or repositioning it ("hepra" vs. "hepör").

Additionally, seven participants identified the Intrusive R as a Hungarian /ø/ sound. Examples include: "For the second time the word 'hepra' was pronounced with a letter 'ö'" (Participant 7); "the 'a' in 'pimma' was pronounced first with a Hungarian 'a', and in the second case it sounded more like an 'ö' sound" (Participant 10); in the word 'crah' in the second sentence, […] it was as if there was an 'ö' at the end of the word" (Participant 16). This can be explained by the phonetic

similarity between schwa and /r/, with schwa often perceived (and thus substituted) by Hungarians as /ø/.

Finally, in three cases, the participants observed an intrusive consonant, but not an /r/ – instead, they identified a /j/, e.g., "in the first [sentence], there was a 'j' sound at the end of 'crah'" (Participant 19). This could be due to the fact that English /r/ is like a glide, with a vowel-like formant structure, making it sound more like /j/ to Hungarian speakers, particularly in contrast to the very consonantal Hungarian /r/, especially when the sound is unexpected. Alternatively, it is also possible that these learners possess some knowledge of hiatus fillers, but their perception is influenced by the fact that in Hungarian only /j/ can act as a hiatus filler.

5. Conclusion

This study has investigated the perception of Intrusive R among Hungarian learners of English. The findings indicate that the participants demonstrated a moderate ability to detect Intrusive Rs, identifying the difference in half of the instances tested (though only a fifth of the instances were described accurately). Of the variables examined, the presence of another /r/ nearby and the order of the sentences in the perception task emerged as potentially influential factors in learners' perception, with more Intrusive Rs detected when there was no other /r/ sound near the intrusive one, and when the Intrusive R appeared in the second sentence. Participants' qualitative descriptions of their perceptions of Intrusive R highlighted various themes, such as clarity and emphasis issues, associations with other lexical items, and misperceptions of the /r/ as other consonant sounds.

Nevertheless, the study suffers from a few limitations, which may have impacted the results. The sentence pairs used in the AX discrimination task were not the original and an artificially modified version of the same recording; instead, the stimulus provider read out each sentence twice. This approach ensured natural-sounding stimuli, but despite all efforts on the speaker's part to maintain consistency apart from the presence or absence of Intrusive Rs, unintended, subtle differences may have occurred between the two renditions of each sentence. These variations could have been perceptible to some participants, potentially diverting their attention away from the intended variable.

It is also important to acknowledge that data collection was conducted in an unobserved environment, with participants typing the differences they noticed between the sentence pairs. As described in Section 3.2, this method was chosen

primarily to increase the number of participants and to minimise the Hawthorne effect / observer's paradox. However, while advantageous in these respects, this method has inherent drawbacks: participants may have been able to articulate their observations more effectively and accurately in a verbal form rather than in writing. Furthermore, as the experiment progressed, participant fatigue may have led to decreased attention and thus less detailed responses, potentially contributing to data loss. Additionally, it remains uncertain whether participants adhered strictly to the instructions, especially the one about not replaying the recordings – this possibility may also have impacted comparability across responses.

Moving forward, future iterations of this study could benefit from dividing it into two separate phases. Firstly, a qualitative phase could involve a small number of participants performing a similar discrimination task, but in an observed environment. Participants would provide binary answers on a computer, and qualitative responses verbally, which would be recorded and transcribed. We are also considering having participants listen to each stimulus twice, and consistently placing the Intrusive R in the second sentence of the sentence pairs. Subsequently, in a quantitative phase, a larger pool of participants could be examined, using a yes/no format to identify Intrusive Rs in audio stimuli. With participants informed about what to listen for, no distractors would be necessary, allowing for the inclusion of more stimuli. Such a larger-scale approach would facilitate a comprehensive quantitative analysis, exploring not only the variables discussed in this paper, but also others such as explicit knowledge (which was not addressed here, since unfamiliarity with the feature was one of the criteria participants had to meet).

In conclusion, our study has highlighted the complexity of Intrusive R perception, thus paving the way for further exploration. The modifications we proposed could offer a deeper insight into the participants' perception of Intrusive R as well as the influence of various linguistic variables on their perception.

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Appendix

1. I was scared when I saw a dog.
2. Doing yoga is good for you.
3. She jicked the pimma in the jave.
4. A plaw and a zunny are fiking.
5. My mother-in-law is nice.
6. The glah is my penchy wuck.
7. This paper gives extra information.
8. The health spa is still open.
9. The frimpy traw is a hurn.
10. He bizzed the fimra in the beel.
11. His camera and his tablet are there.
12. It's easy to draw a cat.
13. He glonked the limmy zaa at the frummy.
14. They himmed the hepra and the crat.
15. My grandma is the best cook.
16. A nemp jimps the crah into the tole.
17. Would you like pizza or spaghetti?

Reviews

Joseph Rex Young: *George R.R. Martin and the Fantasy Form*, New York: Routledge, 2019

Nikolett Sipos[1]

Joseph Rex Young's book titled *George R.R. Martin and the Fantasy Form* fills a tremendous gap that has been present in contemporary fantasy studies: while several books have been written about the study of Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* that focus on the different readings of the fantasy series, and the success of the mega-franchise that grew out of the narrative, Young's monograph attempts to find Martin's place in the modern fantasy genre. One of the most refreshing aspects of the book is that instead of treating Tolkien and his work as the exemplar of fantasy, Young highlights how while it is to some extent understandable (since Tolkien's popularity in the genre is beyond dispute), "Tolkien was a hugely idiosyncratic writer whose inspirations, motives and methodologies bear little resemblance to those of the authors of genre fantasy, much of which consists of narrative iterations of pre-existing intellectual properties" (4–5). While several comparisons have been made in fan circles between *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and how Martin has changed the rules of the fantasy genre, Young argues that instead of abandoning the rules of the fantasy formulae, Martin followed them very strictly. Thus, *George R.R. Martin and the Fantasy Form* is about the analysis of how Martin's epic saga relates to the genre of fantasy.

In Chapter 1 titled "The American Pratchett? – Muck and Modality", Young is discussing whether Martin's work should really be compared to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Lev Grossmann, American novelist and journalist once called Martin "the American Tolkien" in a *Time* article that was written about the fourth volume of the epic fantasy saga, titled *A Feast for Crows*. According to Grossmann, Martin's prose is different from the Tolkienian narrative since his characters are more complex, and they are also introduced as "slugging it out in the muck, for money and power and lust and love" (Grossman 2005). However, Young argues that there are two problems with this statement: first of all, it overemphasizes the innovation and the importance of Martin's complex characters, and his references to muck are not only

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realistic, but they serve as an important tool to alter the readers' understanding of the characters. Young references Northrop Frye's theory of modes: he argues that while Martin utilizes the ironic mode to highlight the not so noble features of the characters, Tolkien turns towards the high-mimetic narrative, which results in the readers looking up to the characters.

The author further elaborates on the issue of the question of good and evil in fantasy, and argues that there have been several fantasists (E.R. Eddison, David Lindsay, Mervyn Peake, or J.K. Rowling) who raised questions about morality – instead of coming up with something new, Martin just follows this tradition. Furthermore, Tolkien's characters are also morally sophisticated, since it is suggested several times throughout the trilogy that the Ring brings out the worst of the ringbearers. Grossmann also suggests that Martin is more realistic, since his world and his characters do not follow the aesthetics of the antique glamour of the Middle Ages that is present in several sword and sorcery texts, but they are rather shown in a primitive barbarity, covered in dirt and blood. Frye argues that Martin uses this technique in order to critique the medieval world, and strengthen the readers' feelings about the unjust and backward nature of this world. At the end of the chapter, Young comes to the conclusion that because of the aforementioned reasons, Martin should not be called the "American Tolkien," but rather the "American Pratchett," since by using the ironic mode, he shows a very different reality from that of Tolkien – however, there are several parallels between *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the writings of Terry Pratchett, including irony, toilet humour, alazons, and the mocking of literary convention.

Chapter 2 ("'Enough about Whores' – Sex and Characterisation") focuses on the depiction of human sexuality in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, since the series became famous for the vast number of references to sex. By applying Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological model of reading, Young argues that sex and sexual violence serves an important role in these novels, since these scenes offer several hints about the true personality of the characters: "[p]ut simply, he uses sex as a way of encouraging readers to consider the way his characters interact with his world" (41). Tywin Lannister, for example, spends his last night with a prostitute, and also orders the gang-rape of his son's first wife, because he did not want to be related to a low-born girl. However, their sexuality can also paint a more positive picture about a character: in the case of the Starks, for example, one of the early scenes of *A Game of Thrones* describes the sexual intercourse of Catelyn Stark and her husband, Ned, and how she wanted Ned's seed to quicken in her, which shows how she considers

someone that she loves. As Young suggests, "Martin's game of beds runs parallel to the game of thrones, providing an alternative, implied moral spectrum with which the author can discreetly keep readers orientated in his indictment of bloodthirsty aristocratic presumption" (45). However, sex can also serve a third way: the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is a world of patriarchy, several female characters use their sexuality to rebel against the expectations they face from their community. After Ygritte sees Jon Snow as someone desirable, she starts acting on her desires, while Gilly also persuades Samwell Tarly to sleep with her.

The next chapter, "'Look with Your Eyes' – Immersion and Thinning" offers a genre-specific examination of the series and describes Martin's world as a place where magic and morality is constantly diminishing, and thus, Young connects *A Song of Ice and Fire* to modern fantasy. He uses John Clute's term *thinning*, which is "the passing away of a higher and more intense reality" (Clute and Grant 1999, 942). In the world of Westeros, the Targaryens are modally romantic, since just like the dragons, they are also dissipating as the ruling dynasty. Young also argues that the best way that the readers can feel this thinning is through immersion, which allows the readers to see everything through the eyes of the focalizer. However, Martin uses other Mendlesohnian strategies (portal-quest, immersion, intrusion, liminal) as well in order to evoke this thinning, including the Starks' portal-quest when they leave Winterfell: still, it is mostly immersion that reveals that meaning is inherently missing from this world.

Chapter 4 ("'Dead Men Come Hunting' – Intrusion and Recovery") examines two other Mendlesohnian subplots that play an important role in the series: Bran's portal-quest journey and Jon Snow's intrusion. It has already been established that something is missing from Martin's world, and these two storylines show that there may be some truth out there that is incredibly hard to grasp. While Bran is acting upon the truth that he receives from his instructors (Osha, Jojen, Coldhands, and Leaf), Jon can only suspect the truth, as he famously "knows nothing" – precisely because his chapters follow the logic of intrusion, where he is aware that something is wrong, but simply cannot grasp the problem.

The following chapter, "'Remember That You Were Brothers' – Superstition and Cohesion" puts Martin's series in the center of Todorovian analysis: the author argues that while many fantasy theorists tend to push Todorov's ideas to the side, *A Song of Ice and Fire* is a clear example for hesitation, as superstition and accusation frequently appear in the text. Aeron Greyjoy, Qyburn, Cersei Lannister or Melisandre of Asshai all turn towards unambiguous magic, which results in the "dissolution

of median disequilibria in action" (199). Young argues that this, in turn, is again connected to Tolkienian Recovery, since these actions prove why winter is coming: the source of the looming threat is the evil that humans brought upon each other.

Chapter 6, "'But Here You Are' – Magic and Healing," "analyses Martin's work in relation to David Sandner's analysis of fantasy literature in terms of the resolution of 'the anxiety of the sublime moment'" (7). Sandner defined four reactions towards the literary supernatural, which all appear in *A Song of Ice and Fire*: Samwell Tarly tries to *possess* it, Stannis Baratheon is working on *domesticating* it, while Davos Seaworth suffers *fragmentation*, since although he tried to avoid magic, his identity is slowly merging with it. Lastly, Daenerys goes through *dispossession*, since she merges with her dragons and is reborn in order to become a true Targaryen.

In the conclusion, before summarizing the main ideas of his book, Young argues that although it is true that the television adaptation of the series had an impact on the popularity of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and is an important event in television history, its influence should not be overestimated. He highlights how, when it comes to the discussion of the show, it is usually implied that "normal" people become fantasy "nerds"; furthermore, many people criticize the series because it is fantasy. According to Young, one should not think about how Martin "tricked" people to read fantasy, but rather "how Martin's use of fantasy sells his experiments in depicting human emotion, ambition and morality" (196).

Joseph Rex Young's monograph on the fantasy form is an incredibly rich and intriguing read about Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. While I do not think that those who have read the series have to be persuaded that the series has literary value in it, for those who would like to disagree with this statement, Young's book can serve as a great counterargument. Besides the fans of *Game of Thrones,* this book might be a fascinating read for those who would like to dive deeper into Martin's literary world, or those who are interested in understanding why *A Song of Ice and Fire* is deemed to be such an excellent fantasy series by so many people in the world.

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Les sorties du texte, ed. Anikó Ádám and Anikó Radvánszky, Paris, L'Harmattan, A propos, 2021.

Bence Matuz[2]

The study titled *Les sorties du texte*, edited by Anikó Ádám and Anikó Radvánszky, aims to analyze the work of Roland Barthes and the underlying ideas behind it in the light of our current knowledge. Regarding the juxtaposition and the individual elaboration of the various elements of Barthes' thought system, the method used in this volume mainly follows the methodology used by Barthes in his essay addressing Georges Bataille's *Le gros orteil*. This is reflected in the studies with different themes placed directly next to each other, which – though not without some arbitrary simplification – can be grouped into four categories based on their topics: the first examines Barthes' intellectual and personal presence within the circles of contemporary French and Hungarian intellectuals; the second deals with Barthes' semiology; the third studies Barthes' political thinking; and the fourth – through eight different studies – offers a versatile insight into the works of the French author or the general tendencies of his thoughts.

The first group, which focuses on biographical elements and Barthes' influence on his contemporaries, includes the writings of Franc Schuerewegen and Gergely Angyalosi (*Barthes' Olivetti* and *Barthes and Hungary*). Both texts examine Barthes' presence: on the one hand, the presence of the person who is typing on his typewriter, giving gifts, and traveling, and on the other hand, the intellectual presence, namely the influence on contemporary thinkers and the remembrance of Barthes in the individual (*Barthes' Olivetti*) or collective (*Barthes and Hungary*) memory. Gergely Angyalosi's study primarily focuses on Barthes' intellectual presence through the reception of his first Hungarian editions, particularly from the perspective of local structuralist linguistics and literary studies. In contrast, Schuerewegen's essay concentrates on Barthes as an individual who left a mark on the memory of his former student, Antoine Compagnon. Accordingly, the mentioned text reviews

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Compagnon's work *L'Age des lettres*, a narrative that explores certain episodes of Barthes' life. The writings of Schuerewegen and Angyalosi conclude that Barthes had a significant impact on the intellectual circles of his time: on the one hand, as a foreign author who was well-received within the Hungarian literary studies (*Barthes and Hungary*), and on the other hand, as a respected and inspiring teacher who encouraged his student to continue his own oeuvre (*Barthes' Olivetti*).

The studies in the second thematic group examine Barthes' theories on linguistic meaning. Zsuzsa Simonffy approaches these theories from a semantic perspective (*From Optical Metaphor to the Semantics of Perspectives*), while Anikó Radvánszky discusses them from a linguistic-philosophical viewpoint (*The Empty Sign*). These studies identify a kind of relativization of meaning within the Barthesian conception of signs. Zsuzsa Simonffy's writing outlines this relativism along pragmatic necessities that inevitably influence meaning. The last-mentioned therefore does not prevail independently but is embedded in a sociocultural context that narrows potential connotations. According to Zsuzsa Simonffy, this recognition indicates the entrenchment of the semantics of perspectives in Barthes' thinking. Anikó Radvánszky's study also deals with the question of meaning, but she borrows her analytical methods from the philosophy of space and linguistic space. Despite the different approach, the study reaches a similar conclusion to the previously mentioned one, according to which Barthes becomes aware of the inseparable relativity of meaning from pragmatic factors. The sign is "empty" because it does not refer to substances but forms a neutral space around which pragmatically defined functions can prevail. So, the conclusions of both studies demonstrate how Barthes problematizes the sign through the pragmatic unraveling of the concept of meaning.

The third group of studies examines Barthes' political thinking through the research of Marciniak-Pinel (*The Reinterpretation of Marginality in Barthes*) and Nikoletta Házas (*Eros / Mythos / Logos*). The common point between the two studies is Barthes' resistance to herd mentality, both on an individual and social level. According to Marciniak-Pinel, individual resistance in Barthes' work is expressed as a form of individualism based on the concept of idiorhythm, that is, an individualism that strives for a specific pace of life and lifestyle, regardless of any form of collectivism, including the collectivism realized in marginality. Regarding the social aspects of herd mentality, according to Nikoletta Házas, Barthes' criticism refers to „myths" in the sociolinguistic sense. These myths enforce a kind of herd mentality and collectivism through clichés resulting from the common connotations of everyday discourse. The study examines this phenomenon through the methodology of

Barthes' *Mythologies*, mapping the myths of today, in this case the clichés related to family life and romantic relationships. Through the analysis of "modern emotional ideologies", the applicability and usefulness of Barthes' methodology are revealed. Therefore, the above-mentioned studies examine Barthes' criticism of herd mentality from theoretical (*The Reinterpretation of Marginality in Barthes*) and practical (*Eros / Mythos / Logos*) perspectives.

The eight studies in the fourth thematic group show significant diversity. In addition to analyses of Barthes' more famous works, such as *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (Éva Martonyi, *Roland Barthes and Traditional Literary Taste*) or *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (Marie Olivier, *The Dispersed Self of Roland Barthes, or the Play of Chance*), the group includes general observations regarding the author's thinking, such as the intellectual kinship between Gilles Deleuze and Barthes (Tímea Gyimesi, *Intermezzos*), the role of the mask concept in Barthes' thinking (Anikó Ádám, *The Masks of the Text*), or the importance of intertextuality (Dumitra Baron, *Following the Hand*). Elvira Pataki's essay, *Annotations on Roland Barthes' Platonic Beginnings: En marge du Criton*, not only informs about Barthes' thinking but also explores its origins through the analysis of *En marge du Criton*. The study describes how antiquity, especially Platonic thought and its later adaptations, influenced Barthes from his youth. Ibolya Maczák's article, *The Same – but Different: Roland Barthes and the New Directions in Compilation Studies*, also explores Barthes' relationship with earlier authors and text editing methods, focusing on *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*. The main subject of the research is the compilation and its various concepts from the aspect of identity and difference; in other words, whether compilation can be considered an independent product or if it is merely a question of structure regarding the novelty in it. As for Mohammad Reza Fallah Nejad's writing, *Roland Barthes' Novel Poetics*, the study mainly explores Barthes' essays from the perspective of poetics, even suggesting the possibility that Barthes' essays reflect unfulfilled ambitions as a novelist. Thus, this fourth thematic group of the book stands out for its exceptional diversity, offering a comprehensive account of various aspects of Barthes' work.

In fact, this versatility of approaches gives meaning to the title of the collection of studies. *"Les sorties du texte"* was originally the title of Barthes' article on Georges Bataille's essay *Le gros orteil*. The methodology of this textual analysis was to explain the most different elements of Bataille's writing separately, without connecting them in a coherent logical structure. This time, Barthes' oeuvre is the subject of a similar analysis in the present collection of studies. The authors present their examinations without adhering to a predetermined structural composition (aside

from three themes that loosely connect some adjacent studies by their subject). The result of this concept is a kind of subversion of form, which loosens the framework of thinking by blurring the rigid boundaries between objectivity and subjectivity, as well as between the scientific and the non-scientific. In this sense, the "exits" (the collection's studies) serve as multiple stimuli, encouraging readers to further consider the subjects, allowing for individual establishment of logical connections rather than directing them toward a predetermined path. So, the methodology inspired by Barthes serves not only to inform about his oeuvre but also to convey Barthes' somewhat anti-academic attitude.

All in all, *Les sorties du texte*, according to Barthes' practice, serves a dual purpose: on one hand, the studies shed light on and reconsider the "text" of Barthes' oeuvre, with particular focus on personal and spiritual presence, semiological thinking, political reflections, works, and his intellectual attitude. On the other hand, through its distinctive composition, the volume conveys Barthes' method of *lecture en écharpe* by placing thematically divergent studies directly beside each other, thereby encouraging readers to develop their own interpretations and further reflections. Therefore, *Les sorties du texte* definitely fits well into the intellectual heritage of Roland Barthes to the extent that it seeks to bring objectivity and subjectivity closer together.

Reviews

Review of the New Hungarian History of English Literature

Az angol irodalom története [The history of English literature], series edited by Géza Kállay and Bényei Tamás, Kijárat, Budapest, 2020–2024.

Preface to the review series

Gabriella Reuss[3]

Why a Hungarian *History of English Literature*, one might ask. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, as the country's borders opened, the paradigm of English Studies in Hungary changed: teaching through discussions wrapped in soft pipe smoke late into the night as it used to happen in scholarly or university circles during the Socialist regime was not enough anymore. The then young authors of the volume had to understand that to establish themselves on the international academic stage they need to publish in English journals, and in English. Yet, István Géher (1940–2012), a revered mentor and even father figure to the several present generations of Hungarian scholars insisted that Hungarian scholars should care to publish in Hungarian, for a Hungarian audience.

The volumes of the new Hungarian history of English literature fulfil that mandate, addressing the Hungarian public and offering their findings, also in tribute to Géher's enduring legacy. In fact, the entire series fulfils another legacy, the one of Géza Kállay (1959–2017), too. The venture of the Hungarian *History of English Literature* was Kállay's brainchild – a mission that, a decade ago, seemed almost impossible, especially when he passed away prematurely, leaving behind only a gigantic dose of inspiration and a mission statement of the principles of the project, as laid out in his article "Az angol irodalom magyar története. Elvi kérdések" [The Hungarian history of English literature: Clarification of principles] in the appendix of volume 1. Kállay's original project proposal has now been accomplished; the publication of the series (at the moment six out of the seven volumes) celebrates the collective effort of the Hungarian scholarly community of English Studies.[4] The Hungarian *History of English Literature* is not only a professional achievement but also a deeply human one.

In the following review series, teachers and PhD students related to the Institute of English and American Studies at Pázmány Péter Catholic University offer their insights into the published volumes of the new Hungarian *History of English Literature*. Several of the reviewers have also authored chapters in various volumes of the series, but none of the reviewers presents volumes in which they have contributions. With this review series, the Institute of English and American Studies at Pázmány, as well as *Pázmány Papers*, wish to congratulate all authors and editors of the new Hungarian *History of English Literature* on their achievement.

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[4] As to date, by the closure of the editing of this number of *Pázmány Papers* in early November 2024, six volumes of the seven-volume *History of English Literature* came out of print. Volume 5, covering the literature of the Victorian period and modernism, is forthcoming later in 2024 and will be reviewed separately in a subsequent issue of *Pázmány Papers*.

Az angol irodalom története. I: A középkor. [The history of English literature. The Middle Ages], edited by Tamás Karáth and Katalin Halácsy, Kijárat, Budapest, 2020.

Veronika Schandl[5]

In the age where Wikipedia, big data, and ever-improving AI seem to make knowledge accessible at the click of a button, one might question the relevance of a traditional, paper-based literary history. This very issue is addressed in the editorial introduction to the first volume of the new Hungarian *History of English Literature,* a seven-volume project originally conceived by the late Géza Kállay and now carried forward under the general editorship of Tamás Bényei. While Bényei attempts to answer this query in the preface, it is through the content of the first volume, dedicated to medieval English literature, co-edited by Tamás Karáth and Katalin Halácsy, that we find a more nuanced and persuasive justification for such an enterprise.

The decision that an entire volume is dedicated to medieval literature is in itself a significant one, and one that is highly commendable. With younger generations immersed in the worlds of Tolkien, fantasy series, and medieval-themed games, there is no denying the resurgence of interest in all things medieval. Whether this medieval turn and breakthrough in popular culture has resulted in a deeper and more accurate knowledge of the Middle Ages is debatable. This volume is a rich storehouse of well-researched and engagingly presented material on medieval life, way of thinking and culture, offering a wealth of insights that will captivate readers on nearly every page. In addition to more traditional chapters organized around prose and poetry, the volume features sections on devotion, mysticism, and a concluding chapter by Tamás Karáth entitled "A képzelet világai" [Worlds of imagination], which discusses travel of all kinds – imaginary and real, otherworldly and lyrical. The chapters of the volume open new avenues of inquiry, even for those already well-versed in medieval English literature.

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Recognizing the impossibility of writing a single-narrative literary history in the wake of the postmodern turn, the volume embraces parallel narratives and avoids simplistic conclusions, consistently engaging with the inherent complexity and open-endedness of the research it addresses. This approach results in a nuanced and adept analysis that encourages further inquiry and exploration. The introductory chapter, "Bevezetés a középkor irodalmába" [Introduction to the literature of the Middle Ages] written by Tamás Karáth, is particularly effective in this regard. It explores themes of change and continuity in the Middle Ages while introducing fundamental concepts of literary genres and authorial roles. Additionally, all further chapters of the volume highlight the coexistence of multiple literary traditions during the medieval period.

Studying medieval literature resembles a form of time travel or an encounter with a science fiction universe where one navigates a world that feels at once familiar and distant. Much like in science fiction novels, the reader is equipped with essential rules and guidelines to safely explore this rich and multifaceted universe. Therefore, it is essential to emphasize the significant contribution that the editorial chapters – "Bevezetés a középkor irodalmába" by Tamás Karáth, "Bevezetés az óangol irodalomba" [Introduction to Old English literature] by Andrea Nagy and Tibor Tarcsay, and "Bevezetés a középangol irodalomba" [Introduction to Middle English literature] – make to the volume. Not only are they insightful and engaging, but they also provide a strong foundational framework for those embarking on their journey into medieval studies. Furthermore, they showcase solid examples of textual scholarship that are often so painfully lacking in online sources. This textual thoroughness is evident in all chapters. Furthermore, all authors in the volume (Katalin Halácsy, Tamás Karáth, Andrea Nagy, Zsuzsanna Péri-Nagy, Zsuzsanna Simonkay, and Tibor Tarcsay) aim to dispel common misconceptions about medieval literature, such as the belief that medieval authors avoided recognition, or the notion that medieval English theatre emerged solely from the rituals of the Catholic Church.

The result of this scholarly endeavour is a volume that serves as an invaluable reference for academics, who will appreciate its thoroughness, for students, who will benefit from its precision and comprehensive scope, and for the general public, who will enjoy the rich cultural context unveiled through the analyses. Indeed, it is the attention to context that distinguishes this work: frequent cross-references to different chapters within the volume and other volumes in the series establish meaningful connections far beyond what can be found in a Wikipedia entry.

Translator of *Beowulf* and literary scholar, Andrea Nagy's chapter "Óangol költészet" [Old English poetry] provides a comprehensive and thorough overlook of basically all works of Old English poetry, doing justice to a diverse and rich poetic tradition that is, she aptly describes, "unparalleled in contemporary Europe" (92). The section on Old English literature draws master and disciple into a dialogue, since the chapter on Old English prose is written by Katalin Halácsy, one of the founding figures of the Hungarian PhD program in Medieval English Literature in the 1990s. Her chapter "Óangol próza" [Old English prose] showcases lesser known, yet exciting information as for example the Hungarian connections of the Venerable Bede.

Zsuzsanna Simonkay writes the chapter on the romances ("A románc" [The romance]), a topic that will undoubtedly appeal to all fantasy enthusiasts. In addition to outlining the key themes, genres, and works of medieval English romance, Simonkay addresses their later adaptations, including parodies and balladic transformations. Tamás Karáth's chapter on religious and mystical writing ("Vallásos tanítás, áhítat és misztika" [Religious instruction, devotion and mysticism]) vividly brings personal religious experience to life, while introducing lesser known, yet highly influential texts to the reader. The joint chapter on Geoffrey Chaucer by Zsuzsanna Péri-Nagy and Katalin Halácsy is indispensable for all students of English, offering comprehensive highlights into Chaucer's works. Similarly, Karáth's chapter "Középkori angol dráma és színház" [Medieval English drama and theatre] is highly recommended for scholars of theatre history, too, as it dispels commonly held misconceptions and provides a state-of-the-art discussion of the subject. After Karáth's final chapter on the worlds of imagination, mentioned before, the volume is rounded off with an extensive bibliography and a useful index.

Launching the volume on medieval English literature as the inaugural instalment of the new Hungarian history of English literature was undoubtedly a sound decision, as its thorough, in-depth, and comprehensive research alone validates the project. The engaging prose and reader-friendly format ensure that this volume will serve as a reliable and enduring source of information and reference for generations of readers and scholars alike.

Az angol irodalom története. II: A kora újkor irodalma az 1480-as évektől az 1640-es évekig [The history of English literature. The literature of the early modern period from the 1480s to the 1640s], edited by Attila Atilla Kiss and Endre György Szőnyi, Kijárat, Budapest, 2020.

Gabriella Reuss[6]

Volume 2 of the *History of English Literature* is a remarkable collection of essays edited by Attila Atilla Kiss and Endre György Szőnyi, offering a profound exploration of early modern English literature and culture, while also showcasing the intellectual prowess of an established yet continuously rising generation of Hungarian scholars. The book, which might aptly be titled *The Hungarian History and Research of Early Modern English Literature*, represents a significant contribution to Hungarian scholarship. It presents an updated and nuanced understanding of what Hungarian lay readers typically refer to as the English Renaissance. The volume not only introduces relevant new technical terms, such as "early modern" to a broader audience but also interrogates traditional narratives, and integrates the most recent advancements in cultural and critical studies. The authors are comfortable with describing the research tendencies in the past decades, as many of the most recent advancements are actually tied to the very authors of the volume. Nevertheless, this is, perhaps too shyly, never explicitly stated. I have known almost all of the authors individually and the educational, intellectual and cultural background they come from, so I knew what to expect in terms of quality and depth of research, as well as the ease of clear-minded writing that caters for lay readers from secondary and university students to fellow scholars. What amazed me though in reading the volume was how diverse and relevant this generation's research is in early modern English literature and, as the Introduction phrases, in "the production of literature" (10).

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Although the title of the volume suggests a traditional chronological approach, the editors have chosen a more innovative structure. The volume is divided into three sections: I. "Társadalom és műveltség" [Society and culture], II. "Műfajok és médiumok" [Genres and media], and III. "A reneszánsz újragombolva: a hagyományozás médiumai" [Renaissance rebuttoned: the media of dissemination], and this organization provides three distinct perspectives on the early modern period, offering multiple entry points for the reader. This structure is intentionally designed to accommodate the diverse interests of readers and the likelihood that many will approach the text in a non-linear fashion. By doing so, the editors present a multifaceted, culture-, media-, and adaptation-conscious view of the English Renaissance.

The first section, "Society and Culture", opens with an insightful preface discussing the methodologies and objectives of the collection. The essays here focus on the social, religious, and cultural transformations, layers of popular culture, and knowledge transfers of the period, with special attention to the birth of literary subjectivity and female authors (with insightful contributions by Endre György Szőnyi, Anikó Oroszlán, and Attila Atilla Kiss). Each (sub)chapter is meticulously curated. The papers feature each contributor's strengths and research profile, as illustrated by Endre György Szőnyi's "Változó reneszánszképek a kulturális fordulat után" [Changing perceptions of the Renaissance after the cultural turn], Tibor Fabiny's "A reformáció kezdeteitől a puritán forradalomig" [From the early stages of Reformation to the Puritan revolution] exploring the religious and humanistic dynamics of the age, Kinga Földváry's "A Tudor-kori krónikák" [Tudor chronicles], which delves into the formation of national identity and history, or Ágnes Matuska's "Udvari és populáris kultúra a kora újkori Angliában" [Courtly and popular culture in early modern England] and Natália Pikli's "A populáris kultúra változatai" [Varieties of popular culture], and Erzsébet Stróbl's "A Tudor udvari kultúra és az Erzsébet-kultusz" [Tudor court culture and the cult of Elizabeth]. The section devotes an entire subsection of four insightful papers to the mediality of Renaissance culture, which is particularly justified by András Kiséry's chapter that explores the media of the word ("A szó médiumai. Oralitás, kéziratosság, könyvnyomtatás" [Media of the word: orality, manuscripts, printing]).

The section "Genres and Media" is an extensive exploration of the literary forms – Poetry, Narrative, and Drama and Theatre – and their evolution during the early modern period. While this section showcases contributions from the youngest generation of scholars (Bence Levente Bodó, Ágnes Bonácz, Dávid Marno), the majority of it is authored by internationally established academics such as Zsolt Almási, Annamária

Hódosy, Csaba Maczelka, Zoltán Márkus, Miklós Péti, and Péter Benedek Tóta, alongside the authors mentioned in section 1. The section's strengths are manifold: it delves deeply into the religious and philosophical peripheries of literature, examines rarely treated genres (e.g., country house or estate poems) besides the dominant/popular ones, and highlights authors often overlooked by other volumes with a similar target audience, such as Thomas Deloney and John Skelton. The drama and theatre subsection is particularly noteworthy. It covers a wide spectrum of spectacles (not just written drama) from medieval liturgical plays to the sophisticated tragedies of the Tudor and Stuart eras, emphasising the intricate connections between societal changes and theatrical expressions. It also underscores the non-linear/multi-thread nature of changes, including the impact of Puritanism, and the evolution of stagecraft.

The final section recontextualizes the Renaissance in modern scholarship and deals with the media of handing down traditions and includes essays on the digital humanities and the impact of internet research on Shakespeare studies. The influence of Shakespeare in film and popular culture is analysed, underscoring the de-canonization and democratization of his works. This section effectively bridges the historical period with contemporary cultural studies, emphasising the ongoing relevance and reinterpretation of Renaissance texts. As an important gesture, Kállay's essay on the Shakespeare machine addressed to the volume's assumed heterogeneous readership closes the collection.

To sum up, volume 2 of *The History of English Literature* is a standout contribution to Renaissance studies distinguished by its ambitious scope, innovative form, and rich content. It serves as a testament to the vibrant scholarly activity in Hungary by its engagement with global academic discourses and its exemplary accessibility to a broad audience. A unique feature across all volumes of this series is the practical and stimulating marginalia, which reference to other chapters, statements, and approaches in all the volumes of the series. This non-digital technique of note-taking on the margin is both visual and conceptual, reminiscent of the typography in Antal Szerb's revered *History of World Literature* (1936). Like hyperlinks, these marginal notes inspire further reading and aid in digesting the material. Through these references, the essential interconnectedness of the chapters and their authors becomes strikingly evident, reinforcing the ideal envisioned by the doyen of Hungarian English Studies, Péter Dávidházi: Hungarian scholars of English Studies together form a powerfully motivating community, one that thrives on mutual support and collaboration rather than competition or destructive rivalry, allowing them to continue teaching, writing, and ultimately, to "play on".

Az angol irodalom története. III–IV: Az 1640-es évektől az 1830-as évekig. Első és második rész [The history of English literature. III: From the 1640s to the 1830s. Parts 1 and 2], edited by Zsolt Komáromy, Bálint Gárdos, and Miklós Péti, Kijárat, Budapest, 2021.

János V. Barcsák[7]

Volume 4 of the Hungarian *History of English Literature* is in fact the second part of volume 3. These volumes together cover the literature of the "long 18th century", the period between the 1640s and the 1830s, and while volume 3 – after the general introduction – discusses the poetry of the era, volume 4 focuses on drama and prose. Accordingly, volume 4 is divided into two sections, one on drama and one on prose. Each section begins with a useful introduction (by Veronika Schandl and Gabriella Hartvig, respectively), which gives an overview of the issues discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

What is common in the approach of both sections – just as in *The History of English Literature* as a whole – is that they do not merely revolve around canonical literary works and their authors. In focus is rather the multiplicity of forms, approaches, and conceptions that emerged in the context of the literature of the age, as well as the cultural processes in which the literary production of the era was embedded, where "culture" is understood in the broadest sense, involving the social, political, religious, ethical, economic, technological, material conditions of the period. Thus, in the drama section we can read about the evolution of the physical space of the theatre, about the changes in the social construction and tastes of the audiences that attended the performances (cf. especially Éva Bús's "Színház és társadalom a restauráció korában és a 18. század első felében" [Theatre and society in the Restoration period and in the first half of the 18th century]), about individual actors and theatre-producers who determined the theatrical life of a period (cf. Veronika

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Schandl's "Színház a romantika korában" [Theatre in the age of Romanticism]), about the ethical and theoretical-critical issues raised in the context of the theatrical life of the period (cf. Mária Kurdi's "Drámaelméleti polémiák a késő 17. és a 18. században" [Polemics on the theory of drama in the late 17th and 18th centuries] and Veronika Ruttkay's "Színház- és drámaelmélet a romantika korában" [Theory of drama and theatre in the age of Romanticism]), as well as about the evolution of the classical dramatic genres (comedy and tragedy), together with the emergence and historical significance of the many variations on them peculiar to a given period (cf. chapters by Éva Bús, Gabriella Hartvig, Miklós Péti, Iván Nyusztay, Veronika Ruttkay, and Dóra Csikós).

Similarly, in the section on prose we do not merely read about "the rise of the novel", but we also get a glimpse into the role of several other prose genres that were considered "literary" in the given cultural context. Thus, besides the extended discussion of the emergence of the novel, we can also read about the role of journalism, the many forms and functions of the essay, of the pamphlet (cf. the chapters by Bálint Gárdos, Ferenc Hörcher, Csaba Maczelka, and Réka Takács), and even about the literary aspects of scientific and philosophical tracts (cf. the chapters by Csaba Maczelka, Gábor Zemplén, and Ferenc Hörcher). These genres of course once again evoke the political, social context, as well as the material, technological one, involving such issues as, e.g., the technological and economic conditions of the printing industry, changing levels of literacy, the emergence of mass popular culture, and reading customs. It is in this context that the novel is then discussed. For in the closing section of the volume we can find a thorough treatment of the "rise of the novel", together with the many national and generic variations, debates, and uncertainties that accompanied the development of the genre (cf. the chapters by Gabriella Hartvig, Dániel Panka, Mária Kurdi, and Veronika Ruttkay).

In both sections special emphasis is laid on the contribution of women to the cultural-historical processes analysed. We can learn, e.g., about the radical changes that women's appearance on the public stage brought about in the Restoration era, about the influence of individual actresses on both the theatrical conventions and the drama output throughout the period, and about the crucial contributions of female playwrights. Similarly, in the prose section we can read about the central role of women writers in the consolidation and emancipation of the novel genre, and a whole chapter (Nóra Séllei's "Angol írónők a 18. században" [English women writers in the 18th century]) is devoted to the discussion of the complete overhaul

that the dominance of female novelists at the turn of the 19th century brought about in the evolution of the genre and in the whole of the field of "literature".

Both the drama and the prose sections, therefore, provide an exceptionally broad cultural perspective, which allows a particularly illuminating glimpse into the cultural-historical processes characteristic of the age. In this way, moreover, the book opens refreshing and exciting new perspectives on the canonical literary works of the period, as well as on the scope and significance of their authors' achievement. For in the context of the various issues raised, we can also read about the "great": Milton's, Dryden's, Walter Scott's, Defoe's, Fielding's, Sterne's, Jane Austen's seminal works are thoroughly discussed – only, they appear embedded in the cultural-historical processes which they were formed by and which they also formed.

The book was co-authored by a great number of scholars. The thirty-four chapters were written by nineteen different contributors. The great number of authors makes some repetitions almost inevitable; however, the editors of the volume made sure that the repetitions do not get in each other's way. On balance, therefore, these repetitions end up being an asset rather than a shortcoming. The various contexts in which the same issues re-emerge cast new light on the different facets of these issues, further enhancing the effect of the broad-minded approach that characterises the volume as a whole. To facilitate this effect, the editors provide useful cross-references that point to other occurrences of the same issues both within this and the other volumes of the series.

On the whole, therefore, volume 4 is a worthy member of the series constituting the Hungarian *History of English Literature*. It instructs the Hungarian audience by providing wide-ranging information about the various aspects of the English literary life of the era, and delights by its multi-faceted insights into the related cultural-historical processes.

Az angol irodalom története. VI: Az 1930-as évektől napjainkig. Első rész [The history of English literature. VI: From the 1930s to the present. Part 1], edited by Tamás Bényei, Kijárat, Budapest, 2024.

Valentina Sulyok[8]

Volume 6 of the *History of English Literature* seeks to achieve the same objective as its predecessors: to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature of the British Isles in a manner that is accessible and engaging for both professional scholars and general readers. In attempting to appeal to this diverse audience, the success of the volume is evident, as each chapter has been authored by scholars from both Hungary and abroad. Volume 6 is, like its predecessors, the bright yellow-shaded fruit of collaborative efforts of relatively distant yet intellectually connected minds. From the University of Debrecen, Péter Szaffkó, István D. Rácz, and Ágnes Balajthy contributed chapters to the volume. At the same time, Ákos Farkas and Zsolt Czigányik from Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, as well as Attila Dósa from the University of Miskolc also played an important part in endearing the volume to the hearts of its future readers.

The key question is whether this volume can meet the previously mentioned objective – specifically, whether it can be both enjoyable and academically rigorous at the same time. To promptly address this question, I will first explore the ways in which the volume balances the needs of the two different groups of readers.

The visual aesthetics of the cover has proven effective in appealing to both lay and professional readers. The illustrations created by Csilla Kőszeghy vary in form across each volume of the series, presenting a single image that encapsulates the mood, perspective, or style representative of the respective era – even before the reader engages with the texts. The figure of the milkman featured on the cover of volume 6 alludes to the "everyday existence viewed as heroism" (317), as articulated

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by Tamás Bényei in his chapter "Blitz-irodalom" [*Blitz* literature]. The illustration functions as an introductory gesture, reaching out to the reader.

As one opens the volume – following the neatly arranged table of contents – the reader encounters the preface authored by Tamás Bényei, which precisely contours the book's thematic boundaries. The volume, as all the other counterparts in the series, does not envision "portrait-like presentations of complete works", but an exploration of "parallel and interacting phenomena" (11), characteristic of the era and themes addressed by the title.

The first phenomenon examined in the book is the "continuing mythologisation" (13) of the 1930s, with particular emphasis on the poetry of W. H. Auden. A notable strength of this volume is that it does not offer the reader with a simple "summary" of literary history; rather it provides a broader perspective by integrating the cultural and political contexts of the period, enabling both enjoyable and meaningful reading experience.

A prominent example of the volume's strength is Bényei's chapter "Az angol regény neme: Jane Austen és a kánon" [The gender of the English novel: Jane Austen and the canon]. This chapter investigates the frequent associations of the genre of the novel with the label 'feminine', and analyses the particular forms of female self-expression in the societal roles imposed on women and in their domestic circumstances. Furthermore, the chapter also investigates how these dynamics contributed to the emergence of new (sub)genres, such as the etiquette novel and the domestic novel.

Due to the length of the volume, it is not feasible to scrutinise every chapter within the scope of this review. Therefore, I will highlight the sections of the book that stand out as unique in the context of Hungarian literary studies or those that could be particularly insightful for a wider audience. One chapter that truly merits recognition is Zsolt Czigányik's "Utópiák után, utópiák ellen. A disztópia a modern angol irodalomban" [After Utopias, against utopias: Dystopia in modern English literature]. In addition to its examination of the "Orwell industry" (354) triggered by *1984*, and its discussion of *A Clockwork Orange* as another key text in the dystopian genre, the chapter also provides invaluable commentary on lesser-known works, such as *The Wanting Seed* also by Anthony Burgess and *The City and the City* by China Miéville.

Another significant feature of the volume relates more to its structure than its content. In extensive literary works like this *History of English Literature,* it can be difficult to navigate between the scattered references to authors and their works due

to the extensive range and variety of information presented. To mitigate potential confusion, the volume includes a detailed index of subjects and names. Furthermore, alongside the usual references and footnotes, the volume contains numerous cross-references that direct the reader to related sections and earlier occurrences of ideas, either within the current volume or in other volumes of the series, thus enhancing the reader's orientation within and across the periods.

Overall, it can be concluded that volume 6 of *The History of English Literature* fulfils its mission. Through its elegant yet accessible language, as well as with quotations from the literary works discussed, it predominantly engages the reader on an emotional level. However, this does not mean that the balance referred to earlier is disrupted. The volume's well-organised structure and its detailed examination of each literary period underscore the scholarly quality of the work. The value of a volume lies not solely in what it achieves, but in the opportunities it offers to its readers. This book – whether approached from the perspective of a general reader or of a scholar – allows readers to engage with the key developments in the history of English literature from both perspectives. As Tamás Bényei observes in his analysis of Graham Greene's world, literature is "metafizikai értelemben valóságosabb a hétköznapi életnél, és ekként módot ad az emberi természet tisztább, igazabb megnyilvánulására" [metaphysically more real than everyday life, and, as such, offers a purer, truer manifestation of human nature] (45).

Translated by *Renáta Bainé Tóth*

Az angol irodalom története. VII: Az 1930-as évektől napjainkig. Második rész [The history of English literature. VII: From the 1930s to the present. Part 2], edited by Tamás Bényei, Kijárat, Budapest, 2024.

Melinda Dabis[9]

Volume 7 is a worthy closure of the mega project to provide an overview of the history of English literature(s) for a Hungarian audience. The last unit covers the time range from the 1930s to the present, divided into two parts (volumes 6 and 7, respectively). Spanning over 660 pages, excluding bibliography and index, volume 7 starts with the swinging sixties and ends with Brexit literature. The chapters mostly follow a chronological order, and the majority of them contain subchapters which makes navigating the book easier.

In the list of contributors, Tamás Bényei's constant presence dominates the volume, having written twenty-one out of the total of thirty-seven chapters. On the one hand, this results in a uniform approach with almost no overlap (or serious gap, as a matter of fact) in the discussion of literature in the past half a century. Additionally, Bényei inserts chapters and subchapters that describe a wider context, showcasing societal, political, and theoretical changes that are essential to understand the literary scene, such as the postmodern, the cultural turn, postcolonialism, or even larger tendencies, like the globalization of English literature or the institutional background of literature and publishing. On the other hand, his focus on fiction, especially the novel, outshines all the other genres. He discusses novels throughout the decades, from Holocaust literature, through the swinging sixties, magical realism, and diaspora literature to contemporary historical novels. Andrea Kirchknopf adds a chapter on the Neo-Victorian novel ("A neo-Viktoriánus regény"), and Tibor Fischer is discussed separately by Judit Friedrich ("Tibor Fischer és a kulturális emlékezet" [Tibor Fischer and cultural memory]).

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István D. Rácz, member of the editorial team of the volume, made a substantial contribution to the analysis of poetry. The chapter on elegies ("Elégiák az 1960 utáni angol költészetben" [Elegies in post-1960 English poetry]) delves into various thematic concerns in the works of Douglas Dunn, Peter Porter, and Thom Gunn. Separate chapters are dedicated to Tony Harrison and George Szirtes (also by Rácz), while the discussion of women poets from the recent past is collectively addressed in a single chapter (Rácz, "Női hangok a közelmúlt költészetében" [Female voices in recent poetry]).

The literature from different regions of the United Kingdom is addressed separately, at least in a few chapters. Attila Dósa analyses Scottish poetry, Angelika Reichmann explores English-language poetry in Wales. Northern Ireland receives two chapters, Marianna Gula explores the socio-political background of The Troubles and its literary representation, whereas Péter Dolmányos focuses on post-1950 Northern Irish poetry.

The evolution of drama is examined across multiple chapters. Iván Nyusztay explores the theatre of the absurd, Bényei provides an overview of the parallel tendencies in the 1960s and 1970s, with particular focus on Edward Bond and Howard Baker. The chapter "'Thatcher gyermekei'. A közelmúlt drámairodalma" [Thatcher's children: Dramatic literature of the recent past], co-written by Tamás Bényei and Natália Pikli, discusses Thatcherism in theatre, the *in-yer-face* drama, and other tendencies of the 1990s, whereas Pikli explores contemporary drama and Caryl Churchill in a separate chapter. Although a few other chapters briefly mention drama, theatre and drama receive significantly less attention compared to other literary genres.

The topic of graphic novels/comics has finally been admitted into the company of literature. Eszter Szép's chapter "A Punch magazintól a képregénykönyvig. A brit képregények egyik története" [From *Punch* magazine to graphic novels: One of the histories of British comics] provides a still too brief, nonetheless comprehensive and informative, overview of the genre's development in Britain.

The speculative genres are discussed in two chapters, one dedicated to science fiction, co-authored by Vera Benczik and Károly Pintér ("Angol science fiction a 20. században" [English science fiction in the 20th century]), and one to fantasy and other speculative genres by Vera Benczik and Tamás Bényei ("Fantasy és spekulatív irodalom" [Fantasy and speculative literature]). The bestseller of the early 2000s, the Harry Potter series and the related societal phenomenon, is discussed in a short chapter by Ildikó Limpár ("A Harry Potter-sorozat" [The *Harry Potter* series]).

The challenges posed by such a comprehensive volume are extensive. Making selections, defining the endpoint of the "contemporary" is problematic, as many oeuvres are still being written, and societal and political trends are still unfolding, awaiting recognition by both experts and the general public. Recent events that occurred after the manuscript went into publishing, such as the Covid-19 pandemic or armed conflicts within and near Europe, have fuelled new public debates, anxieties, and sensibilities that were previously unforeseen. Additionally, Bényei explores the complexity of British and English identity, and the intricacies of the related literature in several chapters. He argues that it is more fitting to refer to "literatures in English", as this broader framework allows for a more nuanced recognition of the diverse array of voices and perspectives that contribute to the literary landscape. The selection process inherent in a work of this scope inevitably results in the exclusion of certain voices and perspectives. Nevertheless, the volume still successfully meets these challenges, acknowledging its own limitations while offering further reading suggestions. Finally, it does so in Hungarian and in a language accessible not only to literary scholars but also to a broader audience interested in English literature.

PÁZMÁNY

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