



MIKLÓS SZENTKUTHY

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics



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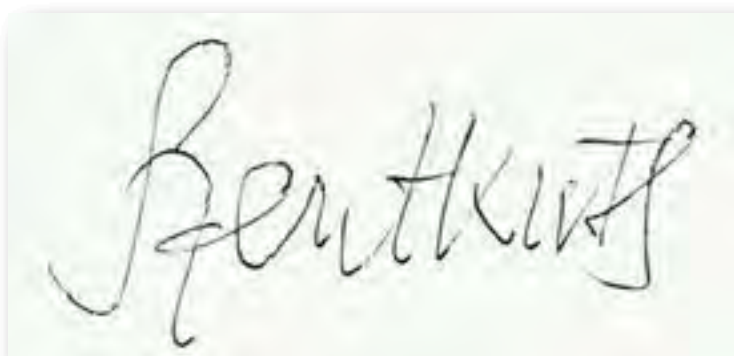
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On the future of aesthetics

The editors wish to express their warm regards to the following people: Mariella Legnani, Mária Tompa, David Brangwyn, Béla Fenyvesi, Kristof Fenyvesi, Frank Chouraqui, Pál Nagy, Gyula Sipos, Anikó Földi, Istvánné Horváth, and Tim Wilkinson.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light background. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style and appears to read "Szentkuthy".

Miklós Szentkuthy

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Towards the One & Only Metaphor¹



Miklós Szentkuthy, 1934 (Photo: József Pécsi)

Miklós Szentkuthy

¹ Miklós Szentkuthy, *Towards the One & Only Metaphor*, tr. Tim Wilkinson (New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2013).

(1)

In starting this book, what else can I take as my introductory precept (or desire) than this: I have no other aim than wild, absolute *imitation*; around me suffocating, swooningly torrid air, in this steamy yet nevertheless certain gilded death the warbling darkness of a pair of sparrow throats and, above all, these million lines, the analytical richness, of foliage, grasses, and nameless meadow flowers. These *lines*, the fantastic richness of this prodigal punctiliousness — *they* are what intensifies my desire for imitation into a mania. A *Catalogus rerum*, an ‘Index of Entities’ — I am unlikely to free myself of this, the most primitive of my desires.

(2)

The eternal game: *to get to know* the world — *to preserve* the world. When I am excited by imitation: is that a sentimental fear of death guiding me, I wonder, a grandpawish fondness for *bibeloterie*, or some desire for universal knowledge, a Faustian gesture? You, you little blade of grass, here beside my pen: are you the graceful seal of ephemerality of a selfish moment of mine, a small witness of my frivolity — or are you a secret of Nature that is to be discovered?

(3)

How interesting the chirping of birds when it sounds like this: when I am listening I ‘hear’ virtually nothing, I only *see*: the black throats of tiny birds, the swelling miniature yet nevertheless *quantitatively* tragic night of cuckoo lungs — those little midnight horns attacking in the trail of the chirping are the sole blackness in the morning light.

(4)

Two kinds of heat: the summer heat of the outside world and a sick person’s fever. Fight in the blue-grey daybreak of the bedroom! That, too, to the ‘imitation’: the lathes of the roller blinds, the moonlit, milky-blue leaves of the plant creeping onto the ledge (at 2:30 in the morning), the lightness of the

street, the gloom of the bedroom, the crumpled-apart eiderdowns, the visible nude-figure syllables — those impressions of mine are the most important, they are *everything* to me. My body's inner fever, '*paysage intime de la maladie*'² — and the summer heat fermenting at daybreak — fight it out. Which wins? Which is due to the girl and which is for the girl? Woman = I wonder, do you, too, come from the daybreak? Stars, flarings-up of marine horizons, your anatomical continuations of the birds and avian throats falling maturely to the ground among the loosening foliage hawthers of the trees; in short, the outside world, the Greek or Gundolfian 'cosmos'³ — or is my fever, my body's inner turbulence, your true brother; indeed, your identity? How gratifying both notions are — whether that is an inner hallucination of my heart, my gall bladder, my vagrant hormones ('myth secretions'), or also like a strange palm on some strange Riviera, an Artemisian, cruel 'objectivity.'

(5)

Can a hymnal life be separated from the analytic life; are a separate Pindar and Proust credible? That question of the two kinds of heat preoccupied me the entire night today: with the frantic persistence, the stubbornness of my half-asleepness, I sought an absolute discriminating definition, and at the same time the dream, the semi-reality carried me at a quite dizzying and irresistible pace towards the rich, swirling nullity of the dithyramb.

(6)

Before going to bed I read some poems by Goethe: perhaps the perverse marriage of banality and *rhyme* caused this thirst for dithyrambs. *Voyage curieux*: the *Spieß*-ness of the *rhyming* makes one more anarchic than the anarchy of the rhyming.

² 'Intimate countryside of disease.'

³ Friedrich Gundolf (1880–1931) was a German-Jewish literary scholar and poet and one of the most famous academics of the Weimar Republic. *Shakespeare und der Deutsche Geist* (Shakespeare and the German Spirit), which Gundolf wrote to obtain a university lectureship in 1911, was a turning point in German language and literature studies.

(7)

The most brotherly brothers, the sole relatives: they are here beside me — sleep and precision, the feverish fiction of possibilities and imitation.

(8)

Drawings cool one: if I look up at the optical mosaic of trees, the sharpness of a million contours is cooling.

(9)

Two female gestures. One of them, really petite but, in terms of her curves, a relatively skinny woman (fairly elderly), adjusts her dress in the street — but how? She *picks at* the silk on her shoulder blades with the thumb and index finger of her right hand — on precisely the part of the body which is par excellence the place for being caressed by a man's hand, a broad and wavy *planar* sensory area (in itself a constant curved Minkowski erotic *space* or *plane*⁴): the woman picks at *points* there just like a bird with a sharp beak picks at a cherry. Of course, it is all much more unashamedly provocative than if she would smooth her dress by stroking it. Elderly woman — girlish figure — silk dress: good.

The other: a woman on Gellért Hill in Budapest is cutting her toenails in the sun. That, too, is 'coquetry,' there is no doubt about it. The vulgar intimacy is erotic. Go your double route, Eros, on the high-minded ways of geometric metaphors and facts — go on the kitchen-smelling pathways of vulgarity and demotic sloppiness.

⁴ Hermann Minkowski (1864–1909) was a mathematician who used geometrical methods to solve problems in number theory, mathematical physics, and the theory of relativity.

(10)

Eros: something geometric, something ethical, something demotic, something natural. — The two kinds of primitiveness: demos and nature.

Demotic = the *animal* part of love.

Natural = the *floral* part of love.

It is also evident here that animal and flower do *not* denote the same nature — two different worlds.

(11)

A little *moral philosophical* (yes: moral philosophical) typology: from the portrait gallery of plants =

a pine: each cone a brown central point around which the needles branch out like a porcupine or star, with each such star ball sweetly taking up position next to another — they barely bump into or intersect with each other;

a young acacia: pure half-light and half-shades, in point of fact, optical hypotheses incarnated as lamellae. What a significantly different *moral* physiognomy from the pine tree. How different the deer-paw graphology of the branches, the Io-embracing with the winds, the swaying, skirt-like rubbing against themselves.

When they turn out in the wind and suddenly display their silver reverse sides; pine needles are unable to turn out like that (another psychological temperament).

The 'monotony,' the fact of the repetition of forms with the pine-tree and the acacia — there are *many* pine needles, *many* transparent acacia leaves, but how fantastically *differently* many those two manys are;

unknown bush: Corot-like, it reaches into the picture from the side of the picture — its branches

are some kind of aquarium-like guards and display a nostalgic horizontality, the leaves are also sparse, resembling samples of bridge cards and amazingly flat. Full of waving horizontal silhouettes as if one were looking from the bottom of a lake at lotus leaves swimming on like embodied shadows over one's own head.

Are these not world historical profiles, the teachings of saints, the victories and fall of politicians, the 'grand' style & petty mannerism of poets =

pine needles
acacia ovals
lotus shadows?

Or if you prefer it, the reverse — hence a little *botanical* (yes: *botanical*) typology — from the human portrait gallery: St. Francis, Hitler, Rabelais, Lincoln, Jacob. (Composition, *ad libitum*.)

(12)

'Form' and 'order': different entities.

The nature of 'form' will perpetually have light cast on it by *plants* (conformation of leaves and flowers; clustering of leaves and flower; relationship of leaves and branches; wind and resistance of foliage; directions of roots).

On the nature of 'order': consistent Freudianism = *botanical* harmony (conformational harmony).

(13)

Foreignness — *sibship*
Motherhood — *lover*

— An auburn-haired woman is stretched out before me on the hillside. She is lower down, I am higher up (who is below and who above is just as decisive an issue as it is for an army at war): when we look at each other and our eyes meet (how plastic and precise an 'encounter' like that, excluding any misjudgments — when one can sense fancying a person more objectively than the most sensitive physical sensor). I wonder what causes the pathos: one another's human *community*, our biological sibship — or the *foreignness*, the

space between our 'individualities'? Can it be determined which sensation is the 'more justified': animal attraction to a fellow animal or a burning isolation from the eerily other and *different* ego? How do both simultaneously have an influence on Eros: it is the biological common denominator at the bottom of the entire human race yet equally the most fiercely *personal* thing, the individual's chief individualizing and isolating factor. This woman: how absolutely familiar, familiar to a *cosmic* degree, we have between us an acquaintance going back millennia, dating to Paradise, our 'geological' memories are shared — the natural history epic of the Homo animal makes its mark in every urban nuance and 'flirting' dodge, "... when we were as yet still *fish*, on the third anniversary of the Creation — Do you remember?" — And at the same time how *alien*: how rigidly, fatefully, and furiously, how impossibly alien.

She is feeding the child cherries, drupe by drupe: the child cannot even be seen, it's lying in the grass, hidden by green — it's as if the woman were throwing the fruit on to the ground. Whether she, a woman or *Fräulein*, I do not know. But there is something uneliminable in that feeding cherry by cherry, something elementarily *amorous*. The most coquettish, shallowest dodge, it seems: maternity.

(14)

The biggest and most important liaisons of my life were these: at certain intervals to see the same female face in the same surroundings without our ever having met before. For instance, at the opera: the girl has a ticket for the same performances as I do. At times like that there is something dream-like, a silent confidentiality between us: the infinite richness of time, the past, of memories, which is to say the principal nutrients of love, and all the same I don't even know the girl's name; we are strangers. Is this not the chief charm of holiday places: the *familiar* unknown? That is why they are the greatest *loves* (the word can never be written down with such total justification as in precisely these situations), because in that kind of liaison truly the *only* thing which plays a part is the essence of Eros: a lovely portrait and passing time: the *nude* figure of Venus being born from the billows of time, which reimmerses into time — 'out of which you have sinned.' What fantastically unsettling moments those

are when, years later, one again meets such a pseudo-acquaintance: greet, no, not just greet, but hug and kiss her, and only at the last minute is one able to hold back one's pathos, reminding oneself that one is not meeting an old acquaintance but, quite the reverse: an old unknown.

(15)

How many forms 'seduction' takes:
cutting corns from unwashed feet,
feeding flipped cherries to children,
stretching out lazily, eyes closed on the grass:
animal nonchalance, playing mother, playing death.

(16)

The strange situation of the woman's body: both the woman and the man 'ogle' — meanwhile a three-year-old girl is combing, or, to be more accurate, she is pulling a comb through the woman's hair, and the woman is lazily letting her. What meandering paths nature introduces the body to ("*tiré pas les cheveux*"⁵ — once in earnest!) as an indispensable character figuring in the eyes' flirtatious Platonism. Laziness, vanity, game, a touch of idyllic sadism, Narcissizing, pose, desire, blasé indifference — for how long is it possible to string more nouns onto this auburn-hair?

(17)

Is any game in the world more refined or verity more poetic and live than the underlying tone of Goethe: the *West-östlicher Divan* = sobriety and banality, triviality and an eastern story-setting which is as colorful as *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. Is it not *immoral* to awaken one's desire at one and the same time for a peasant-axiomatic, level-minded 'common sense' talking in adages — and also for the night, for the Orphic mystery, and the anarchically kitsch (i.e., true) East?

⁵ 'Don't pull the hair!'

The prologue to a summer morning: the agony of the bedroom at daybreak — the secret of dreams, the secret of *raison*, the secret of infiltrating flowers, the secret of secrets. And the epilogue in the boiling southern heat? Conversation with a tram driver: he had drunk no beer for two years as that made him fat; he preferred a pint of wine (“if it is good,” he emphasizes) with soda water. Beer is dreadfully expensive here; the big heat wave had arrived quite unexpectedly. Am I reading the *W.-Ö. Divan* in a fitting manner: is that not what I am experiencing? The eternal duality of banality and demonics (never its *battles!*).

I like a bedroom at daybreak; there is something universally human about it, a laboratory and fate simultaneously. The laths of the roller blinds: with their blackness, their complicated systems of filtering light, and their even more complex reflections on the open panes of glass — those laths are symbols, realities, of line, geometry, form, dramatic monotony, baroque simplicity, satisfiers of an autumnal instinct of mine. It’s the same as the keyboard of a piano: at home I keep the lid of the keyboard constantly open in order to see the sensuous abstraction, the amorous cubism, of the white and black lines. Just as non-linear black roses of music grow into the air out of the primitive linearity and numericalness of the keys — so here the billowing, highly non-orderly paradoxes of the lighting propagate out of the fairly cheap physical orderliness of the roller blind. Every parallel, refrain, and repetition excites me: the rings of ripples on lakes, the escaped powers of ovals on branches, of acacias, fence laths, etc. *Un poète des parallèles*: that poet is *not* classical and does not write rhyming couplets, that is for sure. From the bedroom can be seen the Moon, stars, flowers, every muscle, mask, and *décolletage* of the atmosphere step by step. ‘Garden’: that is some magnificent middle way between biological wildness and scientific laboratory, resembling the old pieces of the ‘goldsmiths’ art on which crystal, a diabolical ‘libertinage’ of precious stones, and the pedantic ordering business of a working craftsman and artist are brought together. The tree that happens to be overlooking the window and is in keeping with it is quite different from trees in general.

In the bedroom is the clock and a sleeping woman’s body, there are morality, death, and Eros. Human beings in a bedroom are *ethically* rather

than physically naked. A bedroom is simple; smooth walls, hygienic. And between hygiene's nurse-like walls the poppy of dreams grows: dusted with poppy seed, sooty, rancid, opiate-dosed, cyanic blue, and with a black calyx. A wife: a marriage's morality. A dream: the freedom of nullity, its all-toppling anarchy, its orgy of problems. That is all *together* in a bedroom — hence all the great big room.

I grasp this arch, shall kiss it to the day I shall die: woman, garden, time, dream, morality; from the daybreak pillar of geometry to the tram driver's noonday pillar ("A pint with soda"? *Benedicte!*⁶).

⁶ A grace word meaning essentially *Benedictus benedicat* ('May the Blessed One bless').

(19)

Huberman⁷

From the moment the first notes of the F minor Adagio sounded the violinist could not be seen, all the more the violin: it suddenly appeared, as in a vision, in a pale Moon sheaved in chandelier-light, with infinite tenderness and energy as it were cast into the air, just like a long-lost jewel that is now thrown up at the head of a suddenly breaking high wave (not like an opening-mouthed sack but one forcibly slit at the side) or a communion wafer waved towards a packed church congregation — the violin's greyish-brown wood: whereas most musicians had a bright yellow, vividly blackish-red colored violin, this one hovered in provocative neutrality between sky and earth in front of the half-built organ.

The vibration of the initial notes and the drawn-apart slow rain of the light were in the closest relationship (the individual rays twisted and the solitary sparks drew apart as when someone stepping through a vertically hanging curtain composed of strings of pearls is forced to deflect the vertical strings slightly to the left and right). The voice was so precise and soft, so airily dreamy and Annunciation-style dogmatic, that the choir and the rest of the audience thought that it did not derive from the flying violin suddenly thrust into the air but from somewhere else, and the arrow-shooting of the body of the violin into this agonic high was just a mysterious semaphore signaling that one's strings and bows should be sent away, all earthly violin playing should come to an end and one should listen to the celestial philharmony.

The notes were so gorgeous that there was something perverse, an immoral 'negativity,' streaming out of it: as if I were surprising from behind the bars of the cadence, plastic in their uncertainty, like the elders spying on Susanna⁸ — in itself it was a bathing of notes which had been stripped nude, chastity in a crystal-clear ethereality, with her provocative, unmistakably whorish gestures. The dead-beat choral singers closed their eyes; with a helpless smile of awe the conductor chewed the tip of his baton as if he wanted to play flute on it. With a curious, ornate Moon round hand, the tones

⁷ Bronislaw Huberman (1882–1947) was a celebrated Jewish Polish violinist of the first half of the twentieth century.

⁸ The reference is to the painting of *Susanna and the Elders* by Il Tintoretto (1518–94), a work that also figures prominently in Szentkuthy's *Marginalia on Casanova*.

inscribed into intoxicated souls; there with a harpoon of melody at its edge while others, coming directly afterwards, paraded with their golden surfaces among the foliage of their dreams to build a triumphant, reverential-coquettish nest.

In the subsequent minutes the violinist, too, became visible under his crookedly hovering violin: the instrument continued to rock like a gold-leaved branch in the wind, with the violinist virtually hanging from it like a sleeping bird, a hanged man, or black rag dangling on a branch. He threw the violin so high from his shoulder that his head slipped right underneath it, and for a goodly time it pitched and rolled there in the shade. The contrast between the sloth, so to say, clasping to the violin from below and the inhuman sweetness of the music was marvelous: it was evident that, out of asceticism, virtuosity, and lust, he was tossing his soul, his pathos, and his instrument too far and too high from himself, and now only, with distorting grimaces of fingers, arms, and face, was he able to catch up with himself and completely cover his own melody shadow again with his body.

When the orchestra began to accompany him with a quite soft pizzicato, the violinist's pose suddenly changed: within a trice the violin swooped into the depths, as if the unexpected weight of the bubbling passages had carried him down from on high and he was now struggling under a hailstorm. At that point the violinist's face could be seen well. An enormous skull was placed above a short, flat-footed, rickety-kneed hunched body. The size of the skull is to be understood as residing in its width: there was a horizontal, virtually flattened monumentality about it; even his 'lofty' forehead was somehow 'spiritually' lofty, though in reality it was rather broad. On certain Aztec idols, on the slightly puffed-up belly, drooping to left and right, of statues of Buddha, and on the lazy and tragically melting diadem of archways of Babylonian gates, one can sometimes see this paradoxical melting into each other of domed height and the flat sprawling and slipping to the ground of swelling, half-leavened dough. Mind and animal bone, artistic Gothic and mineral Romanesqueness are good expressions of the fundamental problem of art: sentimental transcendentalism and material dormant-swirling mass, which predicate, murder, and demand each other. The brow was pale, combining the tints of the Moon's Astarte silver and a nervous *Schwächling*⁹

⁹ I.E., 'weakling.'

standing outside life (mystery and bad neurasthenia — is there not something *par excellence* 'artistic' about this fist-mimicking head?); shades of ash grey 'secondary planets' spread across these pallidly gleaming fields, especially two large bumps, with those pale-strong contours that snails usually leave as a trace on green leaves if they slide further.

Why that, after all, flat hunk of a head, inclining to left and right into the depths, nevertheless created an impression of 'loftiness' was easily explicable by the fact that bodies rising on high from the depths usually display those kinds of arched forms, and willy-nilly one saw in the material the strength which was pushing it towards the spheres; an arc of distant hills which just managed to rise up at the edge of a desert: it was a ribbon which was still half-submerged, but one could sense that a big internal spasm of the earth had squeezed it out of the darkness into the sky; the backs of seals and whales popping up for air from underwater; the rising sun's horizontal yet nevertheless tower-spined arc: the whole enormous skull was, in point of fact a parallel band above barely curved eyebrows, which stretched from the nose practically to the ears.

The gesture was the most congenial gesture of art: the amorphous, barely analyzable big mass, rigid rather than waxily melting, sheer weight, dream, slow-breathing, nervelessness and pulselessness, but the whole was nevertheless raised and driven by something, a hidden divine leaven, ferment and flood-tide. How much more intellectual is a head like this, resembling a sea-rounded egg-stone like a so-called Gothic truly tall and therefore 'intellectual' head, towering like a cone set on its apex.

The geological strata of horizontality were repeated right through the head: the gigantic (but only occasionally presenting) furrows of the forehead, the eyebrows, the eye movements, the frames of the nostrils, the black continuo of the lower jaw, and the closing curve of the chin all ran from right to left. The eyes were narrow and, as has already been pointed out, reached back all the way to the ears. At times two dark cavities were apparent like the ineffective channel of a reed cut lengthwise in two — an expressive, unrepentantly melancholy blindness emanated from them: while the diluvial globes of the brow shone their sporulating whale's belly in the moonlight, ghostly spaces under the eyes gaped a demonic night with the slogan of 'not worth looking at, no need to look, the color and form sick heresies vis-à-vis the tone — a night which, besides all its mystic nihilism, seemed to be a concrete,

slightly dirty, gummy eye disease: chaos and trachoma simultaneously.

One of the eyes had an outward squint: this alternatively dancing pupil at once intensified the protozoon-style amorphousness of the whole face and look running across it, continually recapitulating the horizontality of the earth's surface. The pupil sometimes raced lightning-quickly from the nose to the ear with the muscular freedom of a sick patient the whites not even evident at such times, and with a dark spot filling the eye. On other occasions, in sharp contrast, the eyes grew totally confused, darting frantically here and there in the huge eye area, hummingbirds in their cage, so to say. The eyes slipped almost into the forehead so that they had to be jerked back into position with the butterfly net of the upturned eyebrows; on other occasions they sank behind his cheekbones so that they had to be spooned to the surface by the elevators of the neck muscles, then again lose their way in the whites of the eyes, and the eyelids tormented them with all manner of painful, eelish waves; in the end, it often happened that the eyes more or less catapulted the pupils from the corners of the eyes, over and beyond the ecstatic boundary — the *limes* — of *strabismus*, among the choral singers or the audience.

His nose, in relation to the archaic plasma tempi of other parts of his skull, accommodated to clichés: it was hooked and at the lower end a swollen printing error in the text of the alluvium. The lower lip detached from the face like one side of boiled fish from vertically placed fish bones: drooping, curled, twisted under itself, like a black scroll of papyrus, or stretched nostalgically forward, like Oriental vases or the rim of a well. The sometimes gigantically dilated eyelids, the black fins or leaves of salad on these, followed a uniform rhythm as they were also uniform in their lobular outsizedness. It was also obvious that there was a close agreement of muscle between the shadow flesh of the mouth and the nose, constrained as it had been into a hook by all the horizontality: the lower jaw was gratifying with its endless straining forward and its rolling-up under itself to pull apart the nostrils in the 'maelstrom' of horizontality, to annihilate the entire nose — or *vice versa* to tuck an enormous plinth from the mouth, after a brief drooping, beneath the flattening nose.

How much more expressive, more defined, and more analytical a mimic is that pair of hawser-thick wrinkles on the brow, the sick and 'senseless' cross-eyedness of the eyes, each sudden sea-swelling on the chin of a lower jaw provocatively fattened into a caterpillar, the movements of the head clumsy in an octopus fashion — like a confused and indiscriminately psychologized and

humanized play of features of a professional actor able to control every muscle and nerve. That head and rhythm were the true, the sole possible parallels to the string of tones, uniting as they did every bestiality and mathematical character, which beaded out, crystal-clear, from the violin. The enchanting '*dulcor*'¹⁰ of the Adagio did not call for a portrait of a transfigured seraph but this sort of sloth-bodied and moldy-skinned Caliban above the bone cushion of the violin.

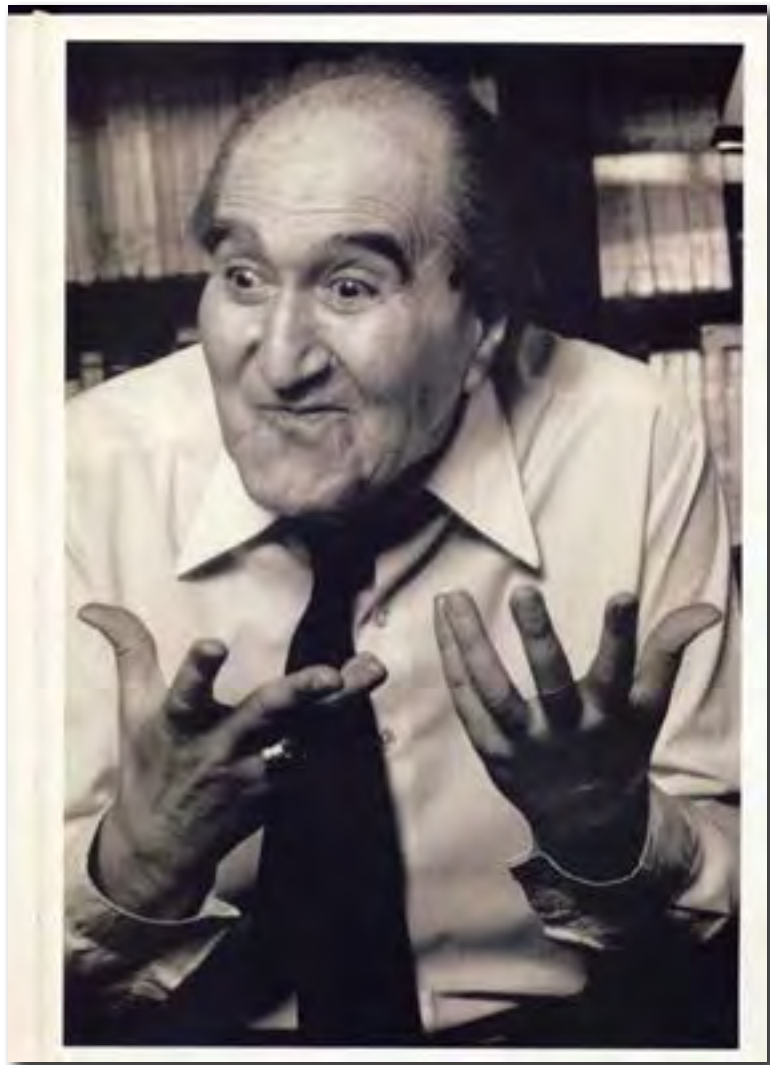
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¹⁰ *Dulcor* is the Latin for sweetness.

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

MASKS BEHIND MASKS:
A PORTRAIT OF
MIKLÓS SZENTKUTHY



Miklós Szentkuthy, 1984 (Photo: Albert Kozák)

András Nagy

The name is already a “mask,” a metaphorical incognito and a personal statement, the composition of *Szent*, “holy” (sacred, saint), and of *kút*, “fountain” (source of water, well), with archaic Hungarian orthography (“*th*” at the end instead of a simple “*t*”) and with a reference to noble origins (the “*y*” instead of a common “*i*”). The somewhat grand pen name was to be a substitute for the family’s German-sounding name Pfisterer (hard to pronounce in Hungarian due to the two consonants in the beginning), while its meaning had lost its concrete reference to its ancestral identity, which was not of noble origin either. This statement however created a very meaningful identity from the very first steps of the author Miklós Szentkuthy, one of the greatest in Hungarian literature and certainly one of the most original, most challenging, and most productive writers of the 20th century, with many aspects still to understand, to reveal, and to come to terms with, both in Hungary and beyond.

Relatively or absolutely “small” nations — like Hungary — can and do produce great works of art that make significant contributions to their self-esteem, in aesthetic and spiritual dimensions, often opposing the turbulence of national history. This may also serve as “secret” knowledge about the real wealth of a nation deprived of material wealth. It may be even more important in those countries that were denied freedom and independence for a long time in history, thus their accumulated political frustration could have been compensated for in more abstract or more sophisticated ways. Szentkuthy’s magnificent oeuvre is a perfect example of a genius living through the most difficult and often highly tormenting historical times of the 20th century yet remaining untouched by the different totalitarianisms, by wars, and by revolutions; and it is his oeuvre that emphasizes the importance of ideas, values, and achievements that are far beyond everyday crises and conflicts, whether they be social, political, or economic. It recalls the archaic and paradoxical Epicurean wisdom that “they” can kill him but can’t really cause any serious harm to him.

The “secret” knowledge of national greatness is particularly true for Hungarian literature, as it is a basic ingredient of the national identity and self-consciousness (contributing greatly to national pride of the “Magyar” people), while

it is nearly impossible to “communicate” it to those living outside its linguistic borders. The language is ethnically isolated, not Indo-European in its origin, hard to translate faithfully to any other language, however extremely fit for artistic use. All these difficulties become nearly “visible” in Szentkuthy’s texts, for in his oeuvre language includes everything, even if narration, metaphors, description, reflection and all possible (and translatable) poetic and rhetorical categories are substantial in his novels, yet the real medium is Szentkuthy’s language, used and paraphrased in an poetically original way, which is deeply rooted in his knowledge and in his experience of the philosophy of language, while applied with a very personal and playful emphasis of artistic communication.

Thus Szentkuthy’s literary individuality is created and presented by his characteristic use of Hungarian, deeply rooted in his own history, both in the given (inherited) and in the chosen (willfully obtained). He was born into a family in which significant ancestors on the father’s side already paved the way toward artistic sensitivity, mainly in the world of theater; that later also shaped Szentkuthy’s rhetorical patterns and helped in *per-forming* his texts, which sometimes were composed as “staging” different characters, conflicts, ideas, with their typical voice, role, influence. His artistic identity beyond writing was often manifested in theatrical features; once, for example, while dressed in a cardinal’s robe, Szentkuthy blessed Budapest, the sinful city; while in social situations, when arguing, talking, and entertaining friends, he was a remarkable master of performance. These ancestors were followed by Pfisterers who represented a typical Central European bourgeois life, based on modest professions that excluded any kind of “extravagance,” art included. In the case of Szentkuthy’s father, this resulted in the lack of appreciation of literature in general, as practically useless and uncertain for making a living. However, once his son showed signs of his enormous talent, this paternal rejection turned into an absolute devotion to the young Pfisterer’s ideas, wills, and choices, even if contradicting the ones the father shared. On the mother’s side, the Jewish historical and spiritual tradition was transmitted probably on a more subtle and suppressed way than the father’s inherited identity, influenced by the mentality of a lower middle class ancestry, thus religious and “racial” differences were further deepened by a social abyss. Finally, Mrs.

Pfisterer represented the nearly maniacal “Victorian” avoidance and negation of anything sensual, erotic, thus absolutely excluding sexuality. Both parents were “madly” and unconditionally loved by their only son, prodigious in the respects mentioned above, and the offspring’s love accompanied his elders far beyond their presence in this world.

The schism between devotion to and negation of the family’s values, the ambiguity of unconditional love for the parents versus unconditional rejection of their mentality and preferences, created a tension that proved to be highly inspiring for the young writer, who soon devoted himself mainly to art, literature, and aesthetic joys; jointly and sometimes un-separately with his sensual “intoxication,” which included a constant and insatiable longing for pleasure, should it be carnal, aesthetic, physical, or spiritual. It originated in his extreme sensitivity, expressed also in Szentkuthy’s overwhelming eroticism, yet in the archaic sense of the word: Eros being the ultimate driving force for all that moves in nature, as those are being driven by pure desire. This schism soon concluded in his works with the simultaneous presence of polar opposites, in the constant oscillation of extremes, a dynamic switching between the two mutually excluding *Weltanschauungen*. All that became determinant for the author in his works to follow, in all levels of his production, from composing metaphors to building characters, from forming sentences to drawing conclusions, providing one of the most typical features of Szentkuthy’s oeuvre.

The sacred connotations of the pen name referred to the author’s chosen identity concerning both the nation (Hungarian) and the religion (Catholicism) that pre-determined the texts flowing from the “holy fountain.” The ethnic and linguistic identity was expressed by the use of the language, extremely “flexible” on the one hand, yet focusing on the difficulties of communicated messages, resulting in a distinct and highly recognizable style. The “holy” mandate and the erotic motivation were permanently confronted in the young mind by *all* the challenges of life, serving as a permanent source of temptations, usually successful, thus concluding in failures and in sins that inversely demonstrate the power of pure and unconditional faith. *All* in this case reveals the somewhat encyclopedic approach of

the author who, by creating an immense body of texts, was consciously focusing on the reinvention of a *Catalogus rerum*, an *inventory of all things*. The emphasis on the fullness and the “Gargantuan” drive behind embracing totality was modeled more on medieval monks and on patristic and scholastic thinkers (hermits, heretics, saints, church bureaucrats, etc. — all familiar to Szentkuthy and often presented in his novels) than on the encyclopedia-champions of the Enlightenment, as for the author, unconditional faith was needed, expressed also by daily rituals and supported by theological and philosophical revelations. Szentkuthy was one of the few great religious authors of the 20th century of striking originality, while his sincere and ardent Catholicism included attending ceremonies as well as being absorbed in solitary prayer, obtaining contemporary theological and philosophical knowledge to face the immense contradictions of the contemporary world. Augustine and Pascal, Heidegger and Nietzsche, medieval mystics and contemporary physics contributed to the forming of Szentkuthy’s religious *Weltanschauung*, which did not exclude closely observed dogmas and the continuous study of the Bible, accompanied by the biography of saints — but also demanded regularly committing sins of different types, so as to repent afterwards and to have first-hand familiarity with the challenges and torments of the unconditional faith of a fallible human.

This dynamics of the heavenly and of the infernal often served for Szentkuthy as synopses for novels as well as for individual chapters, for shaping characters to present and for episodes to demonstrate, influencing metaphors, images, aphorisms — providing a complexly epic interpretation of his very own experiences, doubts, and revelations. His extensive knowledge and his intense religious belief together with his very special angle of observing the world, however, seemed inadequate in comparison to the inherited conventions of late 19th-century/early 20th-century Hungarian novel-writing, which was still dominated by realism and by psychology, even if more and more often questioned. While using a narrative structure for the novel was central for the young Szentkuthy, its dominance seemed to be somewhat dated when it came to writing about his experiences and his ideas, not to mention his overflowing erudition of story-telling, offering dozens of epical directions, angles, and scenarios, all leading to the

same conclusion simultaneously. The complexity of the composition together with doubts about the linear and causal logic of narration, the questioning of the exclusive role of psychology, culminated in Szentkuthy's radical renewal of the epic form, as expressed masterfully in his first break-through novel, *Prae*. The landmark book, published in 1934 (at the author's own expense, or rather at his father's) was preceded by shorter and less ambitious works of the adolescent writer (published mainly posthumously). These texts already revealed the author's originality and his artistic power, together with the search for a method of writing which, in its extensity and dynamism, recalled a historical type of identification, expressed in the title of the novel written when Szentkuthy was a teenager, *Robert the Baroque*. The time of his shaken and then renewed Catholic faith, the recreated totality of the world in the Baroque "passion," with the universe permanently in motion described by overflowing metaphors, adjectives, events, and references remained characteristic of Szentkuthy's prose in the decades to come.

Prae was incomparable, unparalleled, and unprecedented in Hungarian literature, and probably beyond. The inspiration for writing the novel came on a trip the Pfisterers, Sr. and Jr., took together in 1928 and had a fundamental impact on the author's imagination, creativity, and writing method for years to come. *Prae* took the form of a monologue mainly, in thousands of pages, playing with voices, times, characters, identities, and events, enough for dozens of novels, in a text flowing without any interruption (avoiding any typographical or "formal" structure as well), reshaping the form and the very meaning of the novel for the 20th century. European culture and history was infiltrated through the mind of a highly cultured and visionary youth, applying masks as characters and as incognitos, focusing on the dual character of mind and body, of soul and flesh, of desire and fulfillment. The novel served also as an immense "inventory" of the intellectual sensitivity of the young Szentkuthy, filtered through an extensive knowledge obtained by every possible book he could lay his hands on and through the no less enormous amount of sensual experiences he had had by that time. The novel has no traditional narration, no psychologically motivated characters, and applies the most incredible settings, which seemed to be "monstrous" to some critics and to many readers as well, challenging the dogmas and conventions of prose-writing, creating a

new “canon” for himself. Even if the book did not sell and remained unread for years to come, few contemporaries of the author revealed the new horizons that were opened up for the epic forms after the era of realism. *Prae* was a contemporary of Musil’s *The Man without Qualities*, not much “younger” than Joyce’s *Ulysses* (to be translated later by Szentkuthy himself), and it came on the heels of Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, published less than two decades before. The Hungarian author could have been inspired by the renewal of the novel as demonstrated by his European contemporaries, yet his version of redefining epics, prose, and narration was different from the aforementioned writers. Easy to read and yet profound in its conclusions, *Prae* overflows with stories, ideas, and dialogues yet is strictly and masterfully composed, playing with the different layers of history, art, and culture, just as with various traditions of literature — despite appearing chaotic, it remains homogeneous as an entity. It is an early *chef d’oeuvre* while being “only” a draft for the “real” novel to be written afterwards — as indicated by the title *Prae*.

It is part of the ill fate of Hungarian literature rooted in the artistic and intellectual traditions of Central Europe that Szentkuthy’s novel remained substantially unabsorbed in its time, unappreciated, and sometimes ridiculed, even if the best minds and the most sophisticated literary critics understood the magnitude of the undertaking and the importance of the originality of the novel. The lack of substantial coming to terms with *Prae* has a lot to do with the Magyar difficulties of collective identification, with the problems of national and literary self-consciousness, with the hopeless making up for lost historical time — and with many more factors that determined the fate of the novel and of its author in a country where literature was considered more than just one form of art. Szentkuthy fully understood the ambiguous critical responses, together with the basic indifference of the intellectuals, which was often emphasized by the sharp and often vitriolic criticism of colleagues, even of friends. He had to realize that the traditions of the novel in Hungary would strongly resist his efforts to change the genre; that his renewal of the language, his method of composition, and the whole idea of the novel as redefined by him became more of an isolated episode than a new trend that others would observe and perhaps follow. It must have been a bitter pill to swallow, particularly for an ambitious and talented young writer

who had sacrificed so much of his time and energy for the enormous undertaking. When *Prae* was published for the second time, nearly half a century later, and finally appreciated by a larger audience (due in part to slight modification in the book's composition, creating typographical metamorphoses in the text for easing its reception), it was already too late, both for the author and for the public, even if modern and postmodern novels were modeled on the "monstrous" masterpiece and were inspired both by the creation of *Prae* and by the understanding of its historic "failure."

The promised and proposed future that was *pr(a)e*-pared by the young author had to take a different direction then, so in subsequent years, Szentkuthy broke up his imagined greater composition of a novel into smaller pieces, as if to offer the audience, in a piecemeal fashion, the work that was too much to stomach in one go. The series of novels were composed as chapters for a larger body of text to be written consecutively, however obviously differing in their contextual meaning, as the larger opus was based on smaller segments created as autonomous entities. The vision of the author, together with his belief in the larger epic forms, took the shape of a *Breviary* belonging to the legendary *St. Orpheus*, unknown to the Catholic tradition yet clearly and exactly referring to the recreated identity of the author. Work on this project was interrupted for decades and was only completed by the older Szentkuthy.

The inspiration for writing the *St. Orpheus Breviary* arrived again when travelling yet, strangely enough, it came from the direction of music and the visual arts, proving the complex and thorough sensitivity of the writer. It happened during a trip to Italy when Szentkuthy suddenly understood Greco's technique of painting and his method of "compressing" visions, ideas, and narrative structure into one image, while the religious crisis expressed in the pictures culminated also in breaking with the conventions of his artistic contemporaries. The title was borrowed from Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, for the composer was a hero of Szentkuthy's novel and his famous musical piece was masterfully described in it. The protagonist Orpheus, the mythical poet and symbol of love and lyrics, did and could communicate with the whole world around him for he was both human and

superhuman; he could even communicate with plants and animals, was loved by the gods, and could finally defeat death. The symbol of the artist later became a metaphorical image for Christ himself, as someone entering the underworld and returning from it, representing the “Good Pastor,” bringing His divine word as songs to this world. The beginning of the author’s name is identical with that of the title (*Szentkuty: Szent Orfeusz*) and indicates the autobiographical inspiration of the novel, the shaping and modifying self-portrait, expressing also how the young writer was facing crucial issues of his life and of his time. However, both the composition and the poetic and rhetorical patterns were somewhat “domesticated” in this text as compared with *Prae*, for each segment included narrative histories and thoroughly described conflicts of different characters, building more upon the traditions of novel-writing than before. Episodes were unfolded based on a narrative structure, even if often on symbolic ones representing great saints and sinners, like the story of Casanova and of 17th- 18th-century Venice. The hagiography of different popes, the emphatic description of heretics and of inquisitors, determined the horizon of the novel, which was set mainly but not exclusively in history, seen from the contemporary world, and the author regularly and willfully (yet somewhat anachronistically) recalled many requisites and approaches of modern civilization.

History was not “only” the setting but also the context of the creation of the novel, and political events would soon interrupt Szentkuthy’s ambitious and outstanding undertaking for no less than 30 years. The flow of the segments of the projected novel first stops temporarily in 1942, then is postponed again and again, not to be continued until 1972. It is hard to imagine more active and more productive years for a writer than those of the three decades spent without the writing of the imagined *opus magnum*, which, however, he always kept in mind. The fatal interruption did not mean silence in any sense, “only” the suspension of the *Breviary* and a preference for different forms, as dictated by time and conditions. Szentkuthy started to write shorter epic pieces and composed studies and essays; later, translations were included in his oeuvre and when novels finally started to emerge again, they were more official commissions than self-conceived works. As is obvious from the years mentioned (1942–1972), history played the lead in

determining the very conditions of writing, and sometimes even those of surviving. First Hungary's pre-fascist cultural and spiritual context created unfavorable conditions for the young and radical writer, who was even sued by the state prosecutor for defamation of religion and for pornography. Later the approaching war became devastating and hard to survive, while the Soviet liberation was utterly revealing and hardly less dangerous than the German occupation. After some hopeful and productive years (1945–1948), the Stalinist dictatorship created unfavorable conditions for Szentkuthy, as the official cultural policy rejected the *Weltanschauung* and the style of the religious and bourgeois writer, as a result of which his works were banned. When in 1949 the book *Europe is Closed* was published, Szentkuthy clearly referred to a new stage in history that brought the openness of a cultural tradition to a bitter end. Szentkuthy's character helped him not only to survive the most tormenting times but also to keep his integrity, his intellect, his morality, and his sense of humor, not being tempted by any of the totalitarianisms or intoxicated by their ideologies, nor destroyed by them. He hardly touched directly upon current historical or political issues, but indirectly dealt with them in a critical fashion — an oblique reading of his novels reveals his ideas, experiences, and fears of the 20th century, with a great amount of criticism in an indirect manner and in a context that included metaphysics, theology, and a philosophy of history.

Besides his intellect and his character, an emotional shelter was also needed to survive the difficult years, and it was provided by his life-long love turned into a marriage at quite an early age. However, this bond “arranged in Heaven” did not exclude his constant need for new, inspiring, and controversial adventures on Earth, ranging from wonderful conquests to the most vulgar services of prostitutes. It was a way of compensating for a fatally broken self-esteem — “another flower to the grave of the cross-eyed kid” as he reminisced about his many successful affairs once — yet there was the overwhelming drive to both break the commandments as often as possible in order to repent and, thereby, to fight against the anti-sensual legacy of the beloved and betrayed Mother, defeating her maniacal shyness and chastity.

It is hard to know who was the real Szentkuthy: the devoted husband or

the insatiable seducer. Probably both. The mask in general is an important part of the identity of the personality; paradoxically, it may even be a synonym for it, as the use of the borrowed “face” tells more of the person applying it than the features he is born with. The experience with identities was regularly developed into novels applying different protagonists, characters, and roles, yet Szentkuthy had to realize in the years to come that daily life must also be lived in different masks. A mask was needed to hide those features of his very self that were rejected by the more and more intolerant authorities who directly and indirectly attempted and partly infiltrated his life and even his works. However, with Szentkuthy’s intellect and unlimited free spirit, the attempts to control him regularly failed as he was happily using different incognitos and roles, while keeping deeply hidden what was behind the masks. These secrets were carefully registered and kept in a “giant-diary” as he liked to call it, hundreds of thousands of pages of the most authentic chronicle from his early age until almost to his death. It included significant entries for each day, obviously touching upon the most personal and the most abstract issues, being both extremely vulgar and extremely subtle, as well as ideas and recollections of people and events he came across, likely matching the same high artistic level and aesthetic quality as the rest of his work. Even if it will not still be revealed for many years to come, it is an important part, if not the most important one of the author’s oeuvre. Szentkuthy suggested in an interview that his whole oeuvre could be defined, described, and interpreted as a “giant-diary,” modeled on the textual corpus of Saint-Simon and of Montaigne. Stories, novels, studies, essays, etc., may turn out to have a wholly different meaning once read in the larger context. It is easy to imagine then that once the diaries will be opened — this will occur for the first time in 2013 — readers will have to reinterpret all of Szentkuthy’s writings in a radically new way. Surprises, and even revelations, of literary history are to be expected in the years to come.

The diary’s ultimate frankness and uncontrolled sincerity probably assisted Szentkuthy greatly in accepting the sometimes strange roles he was offered, as he could be sure that his integrity remained untouched due to the psychological process of writing the diary day to day (recalling also the situation of confession). This helped him maintain his ardent belief that once new generations would

come they would be able to reveal and to wholly understand what happened to him and to his writings. His focus on the next generations could well have been the conclusion of his praxis and devotion as a teacher, both a mask to wear for leading a “bourgeois” life (once he could not live from his writings), and also a happily accepted duty he spent many years of his life with. “Fityó,” as he was nicknamed by his students (importantly enough making fun of his family name Pfisterer [pronounced Fisterer] and not on the writer’s chosen identity), was a legendary teacher, a charismatic personality and an often capricious man to work with, a “larger than life” figure not only in virtue of his tall figure, but more importantly, in virtue of his enormous intellectual capacity and rhetorical skills, which seemed to be wasted on a world of undisciplined adolescents. Yet he could, on occasion, save important moments to be able to write, which might happen in a pub close to the school, in his studio, or in the lovers’ rescues.

Many years later Szentkuthy characterized his literary output of the difficult post-war years as a “self-portrait in masks” and a paradoxical way of expressing the unchangeable features of the personality in the process of permanent metamorphoses. Though the definition refers to novels written in a different tone from his early masterpiece, the created identities clearly reflect his outlook. Szentkuthy’s “voice” can also be clearly identified in those literary works he was translating, partly as a way of making a living and also of being present in literary life, through masterpieces that were also windows to a continent that was not always “closed off.” Swift, Dickens, Twain, Joyce, and many other — mainly Anglo-Saxon — authors were interpreted by Szentkuthy in those years when his own works were not allowed into print. Translation however was never an “applied art” for him, but another creative way of playing with identities. The challenges for the translator were often enormous, like in translating *Ulysses* many years later, which practically became a form of co-authorship with the great Irish writer, whose novel was obviously untranslatable word by word. Thus, an emphatic and creative *re-writing* was needed to give back to Hungarian the sense of the radically new prose born close to Szentkuthy’s early masterpiece.

Yet there is another mask that changed and influenced the writer’s and

translator's creativity: that of the essays and studies, sometimes inseparable from the fiction-writer's work and often reflecting the translator's challenges. Szentkuthy sometimes experimented with different ideas; in other cases he was commenting on and analyzing works of art, whether they be visual, musical, or literary. Starting already at a young age (for example composing an original and thought-provoking thesis on Ben Johnson after graduation), Szentkuthy wrote landmark studies throughout his life, dealing with contemporary issues "masked" as works of art, with trends and traditions to come to terms with, being very concrete and yet framing the argumentation by philosophy, theology, and/or the social sciences. Szentkuthy's remarkable intellectual capacity, together with the drive to read as much as possible of contemporary literature, of art, of history, of philosophy, of theology, and of different sciences, resulted in a series of masterfully composed and passionately written theoretical treatises. All these reflect the style and eloquence of a writer yet with the metaphysical depth of a great thinker. Accidental ideas and editorial assignments together with research conducted and summarized for his novels revealed the intellectual capacity of a writer, in the archaic sense of the word, for whom a real *Catalogus rerum* was the focus, behind the varying phenomena of existence.

Facing all challenges and temptations of his time, the writer's drive was the strongest in Szentkuthy's life, as the short segments that have since become available from the "giant-diary" suggest. His whole life was serving "only" the writer's needs and passions, while experiences and influences supported "only" the forming of the artist's identity. The hundreds of thousands of pages may reveal that the entire chronicle of a long and rich life was nothing else but raw material for the author. This became visible when the historical pressure somewhat eased following the 1956 revolution, when Stalinism finally ended and over time the terror became somewhat milder. At least one of the masks could have been removed then, so professor "Fityó" could ask for retirement. At the age of 50, while still full of energy and of enough accumulated strength to continue his authorship, Szentkuthy could finally dedicate all his capacity and time to further develop and to conclude all that he had started 25 years ago, hoping with good reasons that the different detours and literary role-playings might serve the author in him. The time hadn't yet

arrived to further compose the interrupted *Breviary*; however, in various ways the novels started to flow again. These books were auto-portraits also, in the forms of masks that finally could be published by the state-controlled publishing houses, thus it was possible to have some critical reactions and readers' responses, which were important even for the most self-assured writer. The gigantic figures Szentkuthy would use as a template for his masks were mainly artists like Dürer, Haydn, Mozart, Goethe, Händel, and that turbulent ex-monk of the order of St. Augustine, Martin Luther. While popular and easy to read, these texts contained many elements of the artistic achievements of Szentkuthy's novels produced by that time, all of which took the form of the so-called "artist biography," and also paved the way for the genius' final masterpieces, which concluded his authorship in the 1970s.

When the author was well over sixty, the artistic tolerance that partially characterized Hungary's "soft dictatorship" opened the way for Szentkuthy not only to rejuvenate his creativity, but finally to throw away the masks he was forced to wear. While there remained enough of what he willfully created, the literary tradition he once established also became visible through a new generation of writers who were indirectly influenced by him through his Hungarian translations and publications of novels that broke with the novel-writing traditions the same way he had many years ago. Time thus "opened up" and the young Szentkuthy's works were published, read, and discussed together with the texts of the old one, who could finally turn back to his most important and most ambitious project, the *St. Orpheus Breviary*, no longer with any restrictions, and with no concerns blocking his inspiration or the very process of creation. His imagination, his sense of composition, the expressivity of his language and immense erudition remained the same as before, as it became obvious when one novel after the other was written, presenting the author's all-encompassing vision of the world as he had found it and as he had left it. Virtuosity and discipline, incorporation of contemporary novel-writing techniques and the polemical relationship with the conventions of prose, shaped the masterfully written books that finally found their way to timely publication and provoked vivid and appreciative responses from readers, critics, and

colleagues.

The time of “harvesting” thus overlapped with the rediscovery of the early phase of Szentkuthy’s authorship in which the “torso” of the greatest Hungarian modern novel — *Prae* — reemerged from the depths of the literary-historical memory and confronted the representatives of the renewal of novel-writing traditions with a glimpse of the opportunities that had been missed in Hungarian literature many decades ago. This was also the time when Szentkuthy’s presence and authority was of major importance for literary historians, writers, and intellectuals, thus interviews and radio and television programs regularly featured him, often themselves resulting in books — since the author’s eloquence resulted in texts that were, though improvised, nonetheless ready to go to print. The later series of his books, when viewed as part of the collected works, clearly showed the magnitude of Szentkuthy’s oeuvre. At the same time, it shows the enormous potential that had emerged in *Prae*, yet which was not further developed the way it could have been.

However, this may not be the last word. Szentkuthy’s masks will not be wholly removed until the giant diary is opened this year and we are confronted with the personality’s naked face. Or, we may be involved in another masquerade — could it be an eternal one in which life and death no longer matter, and to which Szentkuthy invites us along as participants?

Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics

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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Rencontre avec Miklós Szentkuthy: À l'écoute du rire de Dieu

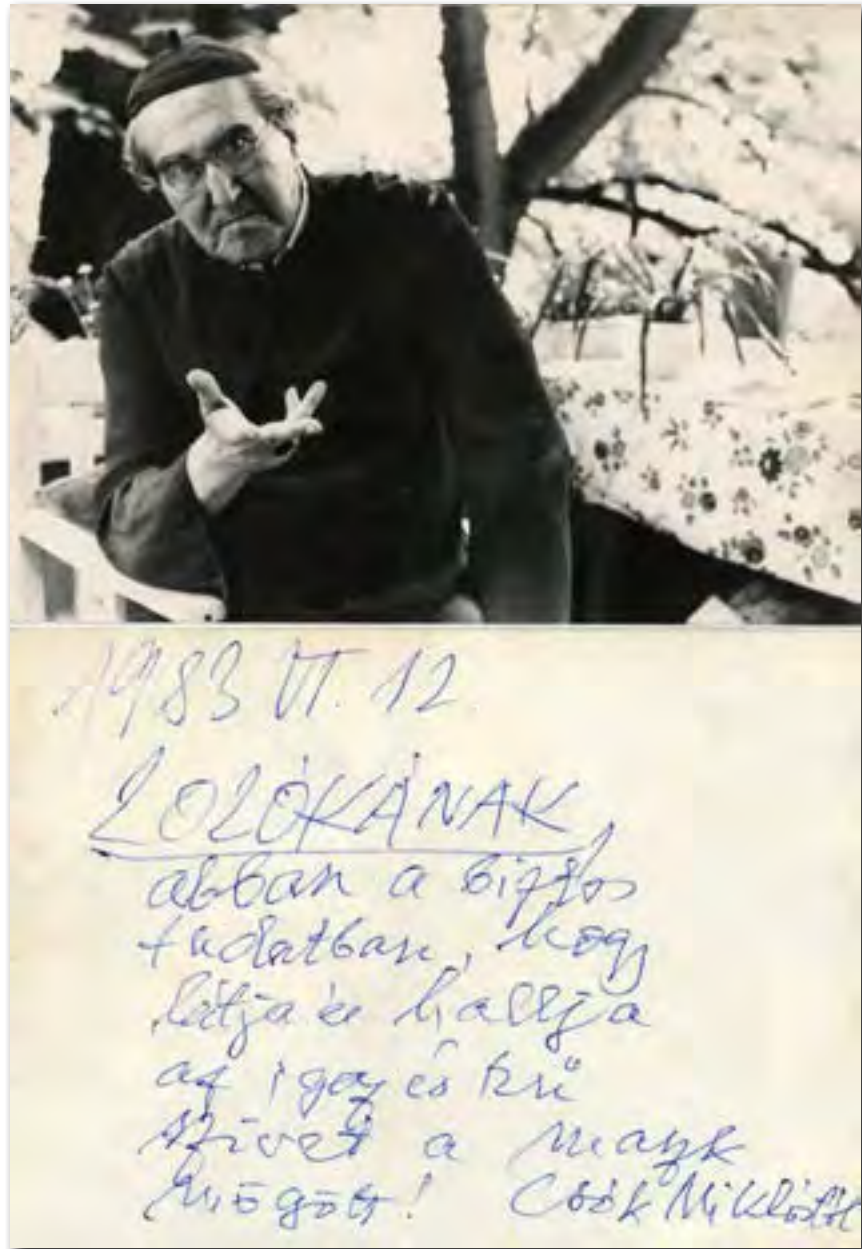


Photo by L. Bokay (1983)

Jean-Pierre Sicre

On ne devrait jamais demander à un éditeur d'évoquer sa rencontre avec un écrivain qu'il lui est arrivé de publier. C'est qu'à ce jeu, celui qui n'a pour métier que d'aider à mettre au jour les livres des autres, convaincu qu'il ne tient pas là le beau rôle, se croit presque toujours obligé de tricher en tirant éhontément la couverture à lui. À l'entendre, on croit ouïr l'aventure de quelque Christophe Colomb voué par son destin à toutes les audaces : « découvreur » de talents ignorés, il n'a pas hésité à franchir mers et frontières pour dénicher la perle rare, le diamant du Golconde, en la personne d'un romancier ou d'un poète qui sans lui en serait encore à ne s'adresser qu'à quelques misérables lecteurs du lointain Hindoustan ou de la Pannonie barbare. La vérité, comme bien l'on se doute, est loin d'être aussi héroïque : cette perle, ce diamant, c'est un voyageur qui les lui a rapportés dans son bagage ; lui-même n'a pas quitté son fauteuil de bureau et l'émouvante « rencontre » avec le génie méconnu s'est bornée à quelques courriers, quelques téléphonages, où il fut surtout question des clauses d'un contrat à établir en bonne et due forme – c'est-à-dire de gros sous.

Si l'éditeur en question, interrogé sur la réalité de son métier, pouvait répondre d'un cœur sincère, il serait forcé d'avouer que sa profession s'apparente pour l'essentiel à celle de proxénète. Une foule de clients inconnus (les lecteurs) arpentent les allées de la librairie en quête de l'objet qui les fera jouir quelques heures : un livre digne d'estime et peut-être d'amour. Sur le trottoir d'en face, un modeste nombre d'auteurs doués de talents divers, parfois – rarement – de génie, offre ses services à cette multitude tourmentée par le désir, mais peine bien souvent à mettre en valeur ses appâts : c'est que ces créateurs qu'aucune réserve ni pudeur n'arrêtent à l'instant d'écrire sont tout embarrassés quand vient l'heure de faire valoir leurs séductions. Un intermédiaire par bonheur s'offre à eux : l'éditeur. Il ouvre une officine donnant sur rue, met une vitrine à la disposition des uns pour faciliter le choix des autres, et le tour est joué.

L'auteur de ces lignes exerça dit-on le métier d'éditeur à Paris de l'an 1975 à l'an 2006. C'est lui qui, entre autres « rencontres », fut l'un de ceux qui facilitèrent celle de Miklós Szentkuthy et du public des lecteurs francophones vers la fin du siècle vingt. Aucune gloire à cela, de son fait en tout cas. Mais une histoire bêtement

humaine où, sur la piste d'un bastringue régi par une absurdité toute shakespearienne, *sound and fury* menant leur cacophonie ordinaire, les occasions manquées et les bonnes fortunes imméritées ont, comme il se doit, dansé leur mystérieux pas de deux.

Mais peut-être l'instant est-il venu que l'éditeur en question lève son masque, révèle enfin sa charlatanerie, avoue qu'il ne s'est jamais vraiment senti « du métier », qu'il n'a fait semblant d'exercer celui-ci que pour trouver un paravent commode à ses honteux penchants – et d'abord à la lecture, ce fameux « vice impuni ». Bref, qu'il serait temps d'en venir à ce qui s'est tout simplement passé – quitte à se mettre à parler, non moins simplement, à la première personne.

Je veux d'abord confirmer que je n'avais jamais entendu parler de Miklós Szentkuthy avant ce jour de 1987 – était-ce à l'été, à l'automne, je ne sais plus trop – où le poète André Velter, que je connaissais aussi comme animateur d'une revue littéraire et comme producteur d'une émission de radio sur les ondes de France-Culture, me rendit visite pour me proposer une nouvelle revue de sa façon – offre que je repoussai poliment mais fermement. Je n'ai jamais été attiré par les revues de littérature, tribunes offertes à la vanité des auteurs qui utilisent ce théâtre aux alouettes aussi bien pour s'entrecongratuler sans vergogne que pour s'entredéchirer à mots mal couverts devant leurs aficionados respectifs. Je n'ai jamais été à l'aise dans le milieu des lettres parisiennes ni d'ailleurs dans aucun « milieu » en général ou en particulier. J'en étais à expliquer de la sorte mon refus à l'ami Velter, assis en face de moi dans mon bureau, un verre de vin à la main (car il faut traiter avec douceur ceux que l'on est conduit à décevoir), quand il me lança cet ultime argument :

– Mais ce ne sera pas une revue « parisienne » ! Au contraire, la littérature étrangère, les littératures étrangères y domineront. Et d'ailleurs cette revue ne sera de nulle part puisqu'elle proposera chaque année, dans un esprit résolument nomade, une sorte de tour du monde des littératures du présent (avec quelques

incursions dans le passé si l'on y tient), et que son intitulé lui-même, ne revendiquant rien d'autre qu'une sorte d'aspiration à l'exil, la garantira de toute attache géographique.

- Et peut-on savoir quel sera cet intitulé ?

- « Caravanes ».

Le mot sonna-t-il en moi comme le sésame de la fable ? Toujours est-il que l'instant d'après je remplissais à nouveau le verre du rusé Velter et que nous trinquions au succès futur de notre aventure caravanière...

Les éditions Phébus, que j'avais fondées une douzaine d'années plus tôt avec ma compagne Jane Scrick, s'étaient en effet très tôt ouvertes aux littératures issues de tous les horizons – avec une préférence déjà marquée pour celles de l'Orient ; disons que tant qu'à gagner un jour l'Amérique, nous préférions, plutôt que d'y aborder comme tout un chacun en empruntant la voie atlantique, la rejoindre à petites étapes par les échelles du Levant ou les caravansérails de la steppe.

Budapest, où les poètes eux-mêmes répondent au sauvage prénom d'Attila, était sur cette piste paresseuse qui aurait fait ses preuves au long de quarante et quelques siècles une étape de choix : le raffinement de la haute culture danubienne n'y tendait-il pas naturellement la main aux antiques prestiges de l'intranquillité hunnique ? Une ville dont le nom seul résumait peu ou prou l'histoire de l'ancien monde...

À ce nom de ville, Velter le tentateur avait joint celui du personnage qui nous occupe ici. Il avait découvert Miklós Szentkuthy l'été précédent presque par hasard, par l'entremise amicale du poète György Somlyó qui lui avait obtenu un rendez-vous avec l'« ogre » des lettres hongroise. Il avait rapporté de cette entrevue non préparée un reportage littéraire bientôt paru dans les colonnes du *Monde*... et une poignée de feuillets plus ou moins convenablement traduits en français mais dont la lecture donnait déjà le vertige.

Velter ne lésinait pas sur les moyens de me convaincre. En peine d'équivalents pour évoquer le génie szentkuthien, il n'hésitait pas à lancer les noms de Rabelais, de Borges, de Nabokov. Mais ce furent les quelques textes traduits qu'il

gardait sous le coude qui emportèrent mon adhésion. Phébus serait l'éditeur de Szentkuthy en français ; et quant à commencer par un opus, on irait droit à l'essentiel : aux six premiers volumes de ce *Bréviaire de saint Orphée* que tout désignait comme le grand œuvre du maître alchimiste.

Ce que je venais de lire était certes déconcertant. Avais-je même fait, dans le quasi-demi-siècle de lectures diverses où avait passé le meilleur de ma vie, oui, avais-je jamais fait rencontre à ce point déroutante ? Cette prose si nouvelle flirtait ou plutôt s'encanaillait tour à tour avec la métaphysique, la théologie, la mystique, l'histoire des mœurs, ce qui n'était pas pour me déplaire ; mais le flirt, la canaillerie n'oubliaient jamais ce qu'ils étaient tout au fond : c'est-à-dire un jeu, fût-il le plus grave. Il était clair qu'il fallait prendre Szentkuthy au mot quand il s'avisait – même à sa manière farçeuse – d'emboîter le pas à Platon, à Saint Paul, à Jean de la Croix, mais son adhésion sincère au monde des idées se trouvait à chaque instant comme déshabillée par magie de tout esprit de sérieux. Que les plus hautes constructions de l'esprit fussent considérées par lui comme une source merveilleuse où son âme curieuse pût sans fin se désaltérer ne l'empêchait pas d'observer que sa curiosité d'homme – ou d'ogre si l'on préfère, puisque le mot revient toujours au bout de la plume dès qu'il est question de lui – restait toujours pour finir sur sa faim, sur sa soif. Naturellement contemporain des présocratiques, de Saint Augustin ou de François Borgia, il n'oublie pas qu'il écrit après Schopenhauer et Kafka, lesquels n'avaient eux-mêmes sondé les mystères de la conscience que pour s'apercevoir qu'au bout du compte le plomb de leur sonde finissait toujours dans quelque chose qui ressemblait beaucoup au vide – et que le moteur de ce qu'il nous plaît tant d'appeler réalité n'était pas loin d'être une machinerie absurde.

Que l'univers ne soit peut-être qu'une mauvaise plaisanterie ne paraît pas à Szentkuthy une raison suffisante pour agonir le ciel sur le mode lassant de la récrimination désespérée. Trop orgueilleux – ou trop dandy – pour songer à prendre Dieu ou son fantôme à la gorge, il préfère lui répondre avec ce mélange de familiarité, de hauteur et de désinvolture qui est sa marque – et qui le conduit en toute logique à retourner vers l'empyrée le seul miroir qui convienne sans doute aux dieux : celui de l'illusionnisme.

On aura compris que, si bien mis en appétit par ces premières lectures (qui, je le rappelle, se limitaient à de simple extraits – mais Szentkuthy est aussi totalement lui-même dans l'élucubration finement construite, ou déconstruite, que dans le fragment), j'en sois vite venu à en réclamer davantage.

J'écrivis donc à Budapest pour présenter le programme d'édition que nous avions arrêté ensemble, Velter et moi. Le maître de saint Orphée me répondit, en excellent français, pour me remercier d'appareiller si vite et si peu prudemment en sa turbulente compagnie. J'expédiais à son adresse des contrats qui furent signés sans barguigner. Et j'invitai sans plus attendre l'écrivain à envisager pour un avenir pas trop lointain (une vingtaine de mois : le temps de faire traduire avec soin les deux premiers volets de son polyptique orphique) un voyage à Paris. Il déclina courtoisement cette proposition : le royaume où il demeurerait – un modeste appartement dans un quartier tranquille en arrière de la colline de Buda – ne délivrant plus de passeports depuis 1948, il avait fini par y prendre tant bien que mal ses aises... et préférait donc me rencontrer, un jour à ma convenance, dans la pénombre apprivoisée de sa chambre-bureau-bibliothèque – où un flacon de tokaj m'attendait déjà...

Qu'on se souvienne seulement de ce qu'était la situation de la Hongrie en ce printemps de 1988 qui nous vit tirer ensemble, mais à deux mille kilomètres l'un de l'autre, ces aimables plans sur la comète. La banquise soviétique craquait déjà de tous côtés, et singulièrement sur le Danube. Mais qui donc, à l'époque, pouvait sérieusement penser que l'empire rouge allait se liquéfier comme il le fit en moins de deux années ?

Qui a dit que les dieux étaient de sinistres plaisantins ? Ils le firent bien voir, une fois de plus, en cette prometteuse occurrence. Quand nous frappâmes, Jane Sctrick et moi, à la porte de l'appartement-royaume par une rayonnante après-midi d'août, nous savions que notre rencontre avec le tisserand magicien des nouvelles Mille et Une Nuits était vouée à demeurer un beau et triste conte : Miklós Szentkuthy était mort en juillet et nous n'apportions avec nous que des condoléances navrées.

Deux fées pourtant allaient bientôt éclairer notre séjour assombri : la minuscule et exquise Dolly, que nous n'aurions jamais l'occasion de mesurer pour de vrai à la formidable stature de son géant d'époux ; et l'avenante Marie Tompa, muse et égérie du disparu, alors dans l'épanouissement d'une maturité toute vénusienne. Elles nous firent avec douceur les honneurs de la royale et pauvre demeure – où nous nous sentons aujourd'hui encore, chaque fois que Maria, à présent seule, nous y accueille, délicieusement chez nous... alors que près d'un demi-siècle de temps à coulé sous le Pont-aux-Chânes.

On nous montra l'album enregistré de l'*Orfeo* de Monteverdi dont Miklós avait annoté le livret avant de prendre, à la suite de l'amant d'Eurydice, le chemin des Enfers. On nous fit goûter le vin de Tokaj tiré de la cave en notre honneur. Bref, l'on fit comme il se doit pièce à la mort avec les moyens du bord : en buvant à la gloire des œuvres de l'art si généreusement léguées par le passé... et à leur pérennité dans un futur qui eût le bon esprit de durer plus que nous. Est-il meilleure façon de répondre aux impertinences et aux cruautés du terrible Kronos ?

De retour à Paris, il fallut songer à la traduction. Acclimater Szentkuthy en notre langue demande bien autre chose qu'une bonne connaissance du hongrois (et du français) : le don de lui prêter, dans l'idiome qui l'accueille, ce parler unique, cette « voix » qu'on ne saurait confondre avec aucune autre. Il fallut pour cela un traducteur qui eût à la fois de l'oreille et une patte d'écrivain *en français*... tout en pratiquant le hongrois comme sa langue maternelle. L'oiseau en question étant forcément rare, s'imposa vite l'idée d'un ouvrage à deux voix : l'une serait celle de George Kassai, Hongrois de Paris ami des poètes et traducteur mieux que chevronné ; l'autre celle de Zéno Bianu, dont on pouvait attendre qu'il sût jouer des deux atouts indispensables à sa tâche : une culture multivoque et un art consommé des ruses de notre langue.

Relire la prose française que nos duettistes ont littéralement *inventée* à l'usage exclusif de Szentkuthy dans les deux premiers volumes du *Bréviaire* – soit *En marge de Casanova* et *Renaissance noire* – est pour moi, aujourd'hui comme aux premiers jours, un bonheur. Oui, Kassai-Bianu sont d'authentiques faiseurs de

miracles : Szentkuthy, sous le domino chatoyant qu'ils ont imaginé pour lui, n'apparaît ni travesti, ni trahi, ni même traduit ; et sa voix sonne en français avec ce timbre singulier – élégance et folie mêlées – qui si fort fascina et continue de fasciner les lecteurs hongrois. Mais le vrai miracle de ce miracle c'est qu'il parvint, contre toute probabilité, à être réitéré dans le temps avec d'autres acteurs – disons plutôt : avec un autre acteur. En effet, Zéno Bianu ayant renoncé à s'atteler au troisième volume (*Escorial*), Robert Scrick se proposa pour prendre la place vacante au côté du fidèle Kassai et s'y révéla d'emblée aussi habile praticien que son prédécesseur dans l'art de la prestidigitation langagière. Tant et si bien que le quatrième opus szentkuthien sorti quelques années plus tard de l'atelier de Phébus (l'inénarrable *Confession frivole*, voulue par nous comme première excursion hors *Bréviaire*) put s'offrir le luxe de mêler, sans que l'alliage en fût le moins du monde altéré, l'œuvre alchimique non plus de deux mais de trois joyeux compagnons : Kassai, Bianu et Scrick...

La presse francophone, à la parution des deux premiers tomes du *Bréviaire* (janvier 1991 – mais quelques bonnes feuilles livrées dans le premier numéro de « Caravanes » en avaient donné un avant-goût dès le printemps 1989), ne cacha ni sa surprise – heureuse, pour l'essentiel – ni son effarement : comment était-il possible qu'un tel monument d'écriture, certes conçu à l'usage du *happy few*, fût resté si longtemps invisible aux yeux de la critique de chez nous (la censure soviétique n'expliquait pas tout) ? Bernard Pivot, animateur de la plus célèbre émission de télévision à l'époque, faute de pouvoir convoquer sous ses projecteurs le spectre de Szentkuthy, m'invita à remplacer celui-ci sur ses tréteaux – ce que j'acceptai de faire non sans embarras, tant il est délicat pour un éditeur de jouer les commentateurs impartiaux face à un public de possibles lecteurs... Ceux qui se trouvaient conviés avec moi à cette émission d'un genre décidément peu orthodoxe avaient-ils lu les deux volumes que j'étais chargé de présenter ce soir-là ? Ils en donnèrent l'impression et saluèrent l'intimidant fantôme danubien absent de la scène avec tout le respect dû à un étranger en visite. Une fois l'émission terminée, et tandis que les participants puisaient dans le whisky offert sur le plateau un surcroît de sincérité, les langues finirent par se délier. Philippe Sollers, parmi les présents, me confia qu'à la lecture il s'était amusé comme un fol. Soit. Dominique

Fernandez, ami pourtant de l'épanchement baroque, mais point entièrement sevré peut-être du lait nourricier dispensé par l'humanisme à la française, avouait quant à lui nettement son rejet – ce que la politesse l'avait retenu de faire à l'heure où les caméras ronronnaient. Il avait lu, ou au moins essayé de lire, mais s'était trouvé rebuté par toutes les formes de l'excès szentkuthien, et d'abord par le feuilleté, trop riche à son goût, de références historiques, géographiques, philosophiques, théologiques, poétiques qui l'avaient conduit au bord de l'indigestion : « Ce n'est plus de l'art, c'est de l'érudition dévoyée, de l'alexandrinisme... »

Fernandez et moi, c'est sûr, n'étions pas gouverné par la même sorte d'appétit. Malgré quoi je suis prêt à reprendre sa critique mot pour mot à mon compte, mais dans un sens que je n'arrive pas à rendre dépréciatif. Érudition dévoyée ? Pourquoi pas ? Mais est-il rien de moins comestible que l'œuvre d'un esprit érudit qui jamais ne s'écarterait du chemin tracé par la sagesse encyclopédique, se bornant à empiler avec plus ou moins d'« art » les strates de sa science et ignorant par le fait les fascinantes incartades de la vie ? « Il sait tout sur tout, ironiserait Bernard Shaw à son propos, mais il ne sait rien d'autre ! » Dévoyer le savoir – ce que firent si bien Rabelais, Cervantès, Swift, Sterne, Jean-Paul – n'est-il pas le moyen suprême que s'autorise le génie de ceux qui ont compris contre leur siècle, contre tous les siècles, que la raison pouvait devenir la première ennemie du beau et du vrai ? Quant à l'alexandrinisme, si décrié par le bon goût antique, ne peut-on à bon droit voir en lui une piste à suivre malgré tout ; mieux : une route à tailler sans prudence dans la sylve toujours renaissante des convenances philistines ? Le tort des Alexandrins était peut-être, au fond, de n'avoir pas poussé leur recherche labyrinthique plus loin encore, jusqu'à la folie, jusqu'à cette perte de soi seule à même de nous réconcilier avec un monde dont la réalité supposée n'est peut-être, après tout, qu'un leurre...

Certes, toutes époques confondues, les lecteurs n'ont jamais été nombreux à partager cette façon de voir les choses. Ce n'est pas grave ; et pas grave non plus si les éditeurs d'aujourd'hui ne se précipitent pas au service d'une œuvre qui à leur yeux a pour premier inconvénient de s'élever sans autre avertissement et surtout sans en avoir l'air à cette altitude où n'accèdent que quelques alpinistes casse-cou.

L'essentiel est que les alpinistes en question – et les sherpas qui leur font escorte – aient le goût des voies difficiles et sachent se monter têtus. L'âge, et quelques fâcheuses traverses à l'heure d'organiser notre succession – qui n'en fut d'ailleurs pas une puisque ceux qui sont venus après Jane Sctrick et moi se sont bizarrement ingéniés à renier, voir à nier purement et simplement notre modeste travail de passeurs – , bref un pitoyable concours de contingences nous ont obligés (Jane peu après moi) à dévisser avant l'échéance prévue et à abandonner par force la conduite de cette aventure szentkuthienne si bien lancée. Là encore, ce n'est pas grave. Peu après nous, un autre passeur, Bertrand Fillaudeau, au gouvernail des éditions José Corti, allait par chance commettre la même imprudence que nous en ouvrant à son tour largement sa porte à l'œuvre du divin Miklós. Qu'il soit l'un des éditeurs de la place pour lesquels je professe à la fois estime et amitié (et ceux-ci ne sont pas nombreux) me paraît relever d'un esprit d'harmonie dont ce monde est plutôt avare. Lui aussi sait se montrer têtu et semble ne pas être obnubilé par les trompe-l'œil du succès. Mais surtout, il est plus jeune, alors...

Alors... puisque c'est dans le temps, c'est-à-dire dans une autre forme d'illusion, que finit par s'affirmer une œuvre, gageons que celle de Szentkuthy saura malgré tout frayer sa route dans cet avenir que les pythies nous peignent déjà de la plus sombre couleur. Si elle nous semble assez bien armée pour cela, c'est précisément qu'elle s'est appliquée comme peu d'autres à révéler l'inanité et même l'inexistence du temps. Tirant le même constat de sa lecture de Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer postulait que la volonté censée gouverner le monde ne faisait pas beaucoup plus que baratter le néant ; et il remerciât chaque jour l'ermite de Königsberg de s'être posé le premier comme l'« assassin de Dieu ». Que Szentkuthy (dont le fier pseudonyme a toujours revendiqué une « sainteté puisée aux profondeurs ») se soit toujours considéré comme croyant – d'obédience, il est vrai, clairement hérétique – m'a longtemps intrigué. Mais on peut penser qu'il devait trouver bien vain le projet de faire passer à Dieu le goût de la vie puisque d'autres s'en étaient déjà chargés avant lui. Et puis, le relisant à la lumière de la seule théologie possible, celle du doute – fut-il ou non pascalien – , me revient à l'oreille l'écho de la belle et antique formule : « *Credo quia absurdum.* » Que ce credo, comme un gant de fine étoffe que l'on retournerait d'un simple geste, soit aussi

un imparable non-credo, m'a toujours paru résumer la singulière fortune de ce monde, condamné à bégayer sans fin le *to be or not to be* du poète. Les dieux s'ils existent – et même s'ils n'existent pas – ont décidément le goût de la plaisanterie.

Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics

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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Miklós Szentkuthy: a True Avant-Gardist¹



Photo by Ottó Vahl (1987)

István Vas

A few years ago, one of the things I had to read through to give an opinion on was a book with a strange cover, or rather it was a booklet, a publication from NRF Gallimard, which with its large format, the whiteness of its cardboard cover, and its

¹ István Vas (1910–1991) was a Hungarian poet and friend of Szentkuthy. His essay was originally published in the journal *Kortárs* [Contemporary], No. 1 (1969). It was reprinted in István Vas, *Az ismeretlen isten: Tanulmányok 1934–1973* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1974) 497–510; and *A mítosz mítosza: In memoriam Szentkuthy Miklós*, ed. Gyula Rugási (Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 2001) 98–106. Translated by Tim Wilkinson. (F. S.)

typesetting, triggered some buried visual memory — but of what? I soon ran it down: it was the *Orpheus Notebooks* that Miklós Szentkuthy had published at his own expense [in 1939–1942], that a small camp — a detachment, more like — of devotees waited for, and greeted, with an excitement that was paradoxical in those first years of the war, gearing up both for the delights and difficulties of reading them.

Maybe not so flagrantly, but the [French] book's content also favored the same memory. From start to finish, it was confined to presenting a famous church, with a few attached associations of thought and the occasional snatches of conversation, for the most part of a high-society nature, that were conducted in the church and in the square in front of the church. Remote and provisional though it may have been, this ultimately novelistic combination of art-historical description, whimsical essay, and carefully filtered elements of an elegant biography most definitely reminded me of one of the characteristic methods of the *Orpheus Notebooks*.

The differences were equally striking, of course. For one thing, the refined crafting, the discipline, and for another, the surfeit, the deluge. I also had to remind myself that Szentkuthy's detailed descriptions of objects were, for the most part, fictional, absurd even: if they did not concern imaginary creations, like a set of reliefs that Brunelleschi was planning in *Black Renaissance*, then the viewer or note-taker caters to the impossible, as with Puritan poet Andrew Marvell attaching marginal notes to Casanova's life one hundred year later, or Monteverdi analyzing Tacitus, or the steward of the Chinese imperial court characterizing the Spanish Jesuits in *Escorial*, or Elizabeth I of England, in *Europa Minor*, explaining Lady Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji*, or Genghis Khan viewing Chinese silk paintings and drawing the conclusion that Europe must be destroyed, or the Mongolian ambassador writing a report about Sappho and Pindar, and so on. Yes, the raging and victory of the imagination is one of the chief differences on the part of Szentkuthy, and the human element attaching to it, not least the total commitment of the self, the personality, even if, for many, it is deceptive, a disguise, a pretense; moreover, the unbridled vigor of novelty, even if that savage vigor — again purely deceptively — is manifested via unmatched cultivation, at times self-conscious snobbery, indeed, even more unusually, often resorts to violence, in contrast to objective, circumscribed description, the smooth and impersonally impassive implementation of the new.

But it was not my aim to compare the two approaches, still less to critique the French school of "the new novel" — for that purpose I would be wasting my time to make a start on that after Szentkuthy's pertinent and unjustly exaggerated, but still truthful and sparkingly witty study — still less to disparage the French book in question, which, let me be honest, is a perfect little masterpiece, since I recommended

that it be published, and since then it has, indeed, appeared in Hungarian: it was Michel Butor's *Description of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice*.

It is just that while reading Butor's book, and recalling the *Orpheus Notebooks*, I was bound to reflect that the young Szentkuthy was not so much a follower or imitator of earlier initiatives, which he was initially accused of (or at least characterized as) being, as he sensed something in advance of the technical methods of the forthcoming rounds of modern novel-writing, although there is just as little affinity of substance to link him as a precursor and as a successor. And of course I could not help wondering how many of those who purchased the *Description of St. Mark's Basilica*, and indeed those who actually read it, knew anything at all about Szentkuthy's experiment a quarter of a century ago. And of those who had heard about him, what had they heard? It so happened that at the same time as I was reviewing Butor's book, I was also noting the critical reception of one of Szentkuthy's new books — it seemed as though the apprentice critics had just taken lessons in healthy critical superiority: how to treat someone who is not accepted by official literature, or its opposite either, and on whom even Hungarian journals published abroad do not keep their eyes as an oppressed writer.

Yet Szentkuthy's appearance thirty-four years ago was greeted with critical attention of an order that few beginners enjoy. Among those who wrote about his first works, often in essay-length articles, were writers of the caliber of [Mihály] Babits, Gábor Halász, Antal Szerb, and András Hevesi. László Németh went so far as to announce *Prae* even before it was published, and he wrote a separate article about the second book, *Towards the One and Only Metaphor*, and to date those two articles still constitute the best and wisest critiques of Szentkuthy. Admittedly, with the exception of Németh and Szerb, the critical verdict was negative, but even that rejection, precisely on account of its extent, its vehemence and its tone, was more flattering than praise from a flock of lesser, quibbling critics. Common to all was an awakening to the fact that the appearance of *Prae* marked a decisive, or at any event, significant point in Hungarian literature, even if that recognition was not so much an acknowledgement as Antal Szerb's was: "It will become one of the great documents of Hungarian culture that this book was written in Hungarian."

Another thing that all were agreed on, again with the exception of László Németh and Antal Szerb, was that Szentkuthy was imitating Joyce. As people are wont to say: supposing, but admitting, just imagine a twenty-five-year-old man under Joyce's influence (and we are talking about the very early Thirties, don't forget) writes a book of 632 large-format, closely printed pages, which, for want of a better designation of genre, one could only call a novel, one could hardly fail to notice it, if

only with alarm. Babits admitted that he was unable to read the book through to the end because he was deterred by “the pressure of its huge wodge of closely printed text (without breaks for chapters or paragraphs) and its formidable Baroque style, which lacks Joyce’s varied experimentation and Rabelaisian opulence.” Gábor Halász, whose article evinced a closer acquaintance with the book, was more decided, writing about “method’s rule of terror,” and pointing out that *Prae* is a “an eerie attack on the Hungarian realist novel,” and it goes without saying that this charge, in itself, shows the importance attributed to Szentkuthy’s emergence in Hungarian literature. Even Babits’ aversion is linked to a measure of recognition when he exclaims: “An esoteric writer in Hungary, in the twentieth century!” Gábor Halász is a touch more nuanced. Where Babits hesitantly refers to “intellectual aristocratism,” Halász notices that “the extreme intellectualism is united to [the] luxuriant nature.” He compared Szentkuthy’s talent to a torrent “whose power could not be utilized,” but, whatever demurral there might be, he also established “there is no doubt that we are dealing with an artist.” And András Hevesi, too, at the end of his scintillating, wisecracking, even scoffing article says something that remains noteworthy even today: “In any event, in Hungary, where literature is young and so smooth, regular and clever, a monster is much needed.”

All the foregoing was inseparable from the question of originality. Because even surfeit, or lack of shape, whether genuine or just perceived, will be judged one way if it is the autonomous manifestation of a talent, and another way if it is clumsy copy. I, too, accepted the definition in terms of Joyce in good faith, as I had no acquaintance with his writings at the time. Looking back on it now, I suppose the main basis for the accusation might well have been that few people were able to read *Ulysses* (to say nothing of *Finnegans Wake*), and probably fewer still *Prae*. There can be no disputing, of course, that the result of a fair few twentieth-century revolutions or, to use a popular critical term, “form-breakings” of the novel that have since become common currency, were also preconditions for Szentkuthy’s experiment. It was with Szentkuthy, indeed, that this revolution irrupted into Hungary. It was also quite obvious that we were dealing with a very radical form of this European revolution, and since Joyce had hitherto been the most extreme innovator of the novel, a superficial acquaintance with the two works facilitated the supposition of this influence.

In truth, though, on actually reading Szentkuthy and Joyce, it is hard to find any important common feature at all. Since it would be more complicated to demonstrate the different set of values that Szentkuthy holds, let me just remark, by way of a sign, on one of the strands of those values. Joyce is profoundly rooted in the past and present of the English language and Irish life; Szentkuthy, on the other hand,

has nothing to do with a Hungarian reality, or even Hungarian culture. As Németh wrote in his exemplarily accurate analysis: “It is not just that Szentkuthy has not written down the word ‘Hungary,’ but the name of not one Hungarian book, person, or event crops up in this work. Homelessness, as we have seen, is one of his main distinguishing marks, as compared with kindred Western writers.” But he then goes on to add swiftly: “I sense that homelessness to be a higher form of protection of the mind.” Indeed, he even exonerates him: “Seated in his place of contemplation, Szentkuthy is a brother, even against his will, to the bellicose of the Earth, just as a cloud is kindred to the plough in a new sowing.” This is an admonition that is valid to this day: one that those young critics of Szentkuthy who, when it comes down to it, are living from diluted ideas taken from László Németh, along with a little bit of drained — or, if you prefer, watered-down — Marx, of course, might equally take it to heart before they start treating this large-scale phenomenon as some sort of recalcitrant schoolboy who has cribbed his homework.

Németh defended Szentkuthy in advance not only from the accusation of a lack of patriotism — he was, after all, as I have pointed out, the first to write about him — but also from the much graver accusation of inhumanity, or rather, to be more precise, the label of the absence of humanity that has so often been leveled at modern art since then. “Dehumanization?” asks Ortega, from whom this characterization of modern art (in his case more evaluative) derives. “But what if it is a more profound type of ‘humanization’?” he added, anticipating the possibility of defending it.

That “more profound type of humanization” in truth only came about with *Orpheus*. In 1942, after the first of these “*Notebooks*” had appeared, Szentkuthy published a guide to the [five] parts that had appeared up till then. This editorial skeleton was produced with the same approach as twenty years later — this shows how Szentkuthy was a precursor even in such minutiae — as the handy guide to contents in the Pléiade edition of Proust to facilitate finding one’s way around the huge structure of *In Search of Lost Time*. The first page of the guide summarized the ultimate import of *Orpheus* so succinctly as to astonish us all, just as it would still astonish anyone who knows the author only from his works. This brief directory, in itself, is proof that the complexity of his style does not derive from simple inability to simplify, or as non-professionals often put it so appositely: he can write well, if he wants to. This summary, among other things, states the aims of *Orpheus* in the following way: “it seeks the man beyond every variant of cultures, all promise and failure of sciences and mythologies, the most distant periods and far-flung regions, the vast yet nevertheless finite shades of psychology. What remains of the masses of experience left behind? What can be utilized in the future? What is the play of time

and what is the indispensable essence and possibly a permanent positive?" Then, even more clearly: "what should the new man be like, and what should he do?" That kind of reference to the future was not at all fashionable at that time, least of all among our generation, most of the best of whom, as a defense against the incursions of the horror of the present, became completely absorbed in the past, in memories, turning resolutely away from any thought of the future. If, therefore, Szentkuthy referred to the future, there could be no prescriptive "pointing to the future" either, just a serious intention to settle accounts with the past, and not with the filth of the recent past but the finest legends of human culture.

This "settling of accounts" only becomes evident, of course, if one can have some purview of the work's structure. Perhaps the most fundamental point of László Németh's acute, early analysis — against the charge of formlessness that was raised in most criticisms — is the sentence: "Nonetheless it is the structure that is most important in this work, not the structure that fits the details together, but the structure that sees the details; the perspective almost regardless of object..." Looked at from the standpoint of structure alone, the fictions and absurdities of the *Orpheus Notebooks* also serve this settling of accounts. It is quite natural that in this settling of accounts there should also be nostalgia for, even identification with, the role that is being played, or in other words, historical enchantment — for without that it would not be authentic or effective. Nietzsche was justifiably concerned about the historicism of recent times, but sympathetic cures are not without effect here either, and anyone who has imbibed as much history as Szentkuthy has, and furthermore is a strong enough personality, cannot be said to be a captive to, but is a grand master of historicism: history stands before him like a mighty organ, and he knows, as initiates do, how the surest harmonies come out of disharmonies and remote chords.

Claude Simon, one of the masters of the "new novel," wittily explains in connection with the new approach, how many things can be brought to mind by a pack of Gauloises cigarettes. Szentkuthy, as I remarked earlier, was already familiar with this associative mesmerism of objects twenty years before the *nouveau roman*. The difference is that concepts and historical phenomena are just as capable as objects to fill this role. Being able to sense a thought just as directly as the scent of a rose was how T.S. Eliot characterized the English metaphysical poets, of whom in Hungary Szentkuthy can be counted a discoverer and successor. "Thought," he wrote somewhere, "is what causes a physiological excitation relatively irrespective of survival of the self and species, and whips passion into the brain." He treats historical material with this sovereign cerebral passion, and that is how it may well be that the historicism can seem, at first glance, to be one of Szentkuthy's most characteristic attributes. He

elaborates it here by projecting onto each other the most remote and incongruous personalities, epochs, and occurrences, taking himself and, indeed, history as a whole *ad absurdum*.

This is the point where I should amend my earlier surmise that Szentkuthy has nothing to do with Hungarian culture. There is one instance in Hungarian literature — admittedly, in itself a lonely phenomenon, without precedent or continuation — with which a certain subconscious affinity may link Szentkuthy, and that is [Imre Madách's play] *The Tragedy of Man*. Extreme thinking and extreme imagination belong to the same organic unity, the same alert and avid attention that imbibes the intellectual currents of the age into itself and weaves them into the plot as if Europe's entire cultural heritage were being gathered together here in Hungary, on the perimeter of the continent. The range of problems is also much the same as Madách's, transposed to the twentieth century, of course, and in the end a deep Madáchian seriousness lies behind every seemingly frivolous but bitter grimace. He is just as little an artist of the Hungarian language as Madách was, and yet, just like Madách, through this rootless language he acquired an intellectual impact and precision that would have been hard to achieve in a spicier, full-blooded Hungarian vernacular. It is part of the naturalness of Szentkuthy's intellectual speech that he made lavish use of contemporary jargon — an anachronism that incidentally likewise contributed greatly to the historical absurdity. That alien-sounding vocabulary of the slang of Hungarian intellectuals — I almost put Budapest inner-city Jews — of the Twenties and Thirties has now largely vanished (thank God, one might add), but it was such an organic part of Szentkuthy's work that — in contrast to an outward, literary use of the argot — that there it does not strike one as in the least obsolete.

Madách and Szentkuthy — I am well aware of the boldness of that comparison, even if we are concerned here with a comparison of qualities and endeavors, not values. It is a temerity, of course, to compare Madách's classical world and rigorous, albeit not scintillating language with Szentkuthy's modern method and complex style. Yet Madách was a true son of Europe of the triumphant nineteenth century: he espoused its moral and artistic norms. Szentkuthy, on the other hand, is a child of the twentieth century and, other things being equal, with a purview and bitterness similar to Madách's — a bitterness so appropriate to the turn of the Thirties into the Forties — that laid Europe to rest in the ground. "If I am curious about any literary work at all, then it would be that of a Rabelaisian intellect who expresses monumentally every drivel of the *Totentanz der Kulturen* in a cultural parody in valediction to Europe," says Queen Mary Tudor, one of the heroines of the *Orpheus Notebooks*, slightly caricaturing the author's intention. On reading the *Orpheus*

Notebooks, it would be hard to deny that this intention was accomplished: there is hardly a more valid artistic document of the disintegration of so-called Western culture.

The *Orpheus Booklets* are perhaps the most mature and most representative of Szentkuthy's works, even in their as yet incomplete state: since the Liberation of Hungary [i.e., the end of World War II], he was not in a position to write, let alone publish the earlier notebooks. After a long interval, the first book from Szentkuthy that we were able to read came in 1957, with his enchanting Mozart novel, *Divertimento*, in which he showed that he was also able to write books that met the popular taste while, furthermore, preserving the achievements of his characteristic method. Following that, a further eight novels have been published to date, some with a well-known person as the central figure (Handel, Haydn, Luther, Goethe, Dürer), others with an imaginary historical figure. In doing so, Szentkuthy has done much to make up for the Rabelaisian opulence that Babits so missed in *Prae*: the books are studded with tumultuous action and full-blooded crowd scenes. Even if they are not linked by a unified plan, all, to some extent, compensate for the *Orpheus Notebooks* still to come.

Szentkuthy's new books undoubtedly reach a broader reading public than those that were published before Liberation in his own editions. He has still not been able to come to terms with his critics (or the critics with him); indeed, he can no longer boast of such eminent allies and adversaries as he could at the start of his career. The more consistent element of the rejection and silence is that on the part of so-called professional critics; what is less easy to understand is why our Hungarian snobs, both here at home and abroad, have not striven to make him one of their own. True, László Németh did refer to "the discomfiture of the dumbfounded" in connection with Szentkuthy, but also "the unnatural discomfiture of the snobs." I do not believe I would be far off the mark in supposing that two of Szentkuthy's greatest values, his unusual strength and his originality, are precisely what repels them. Because that old simile used by Gábor Halász, about the torrent whose power could not be utilized, sadly, is still apposite today. But a torrent, even if its power remains unutilized, is still not an everyday occurrence in literature. And if we now have a careerist avant-garde, an academic avant-garde, even a Pietist avant-garde, why should we not allow ourselves the luxury of discovering a genuine avant-gardist? Because it seems quite certain to me that, at the very least, literary public opinion in Hungary has a duty to respect, or attack, Szentkuthy for being a genuine avant-gardist.

Miklós Szentkuthy, on account of his torrential strength and capacity, is an extraordinarily — I might say abnormally — productive author: just the volume of

those works of his that have been published so far would suffice as the entire life's work of at least three writers, and not lazy ones at that. Any summary of an oeuvre which is as extensive as that, and so little addressed critically, can only be sketchy. But even a sketch would be faulty if it said nothing about Szentkuthy's paradoxical Catholicism, the orthodoxy of which is combined with the most skeptical relativism and an avid curiosity that extends to everything; or nothing about the role of social antagonisms, and the trenchant positions that are taken up, in his more recent novels — plainly, that will have done nothing to boost the author's attractiveness to snobs. And especially if they have not deigned to give any attention to the essays that have been forged in the full armor of Szentkuthy's method and art. Let me just mention, by way of example, two iconoclastically bold studies from the first and second halves of his career: the attack he made on Kerényi's mythological mystification, at the very time when the spread of that mystification was at its height, and the already mentioned satire on the "new novel."

The present article, however, is just a simple introduction to, let us call it: a reading of Szentkuthy. An introduction of this kind, sadly, is necessary both for the author and the reader. For who among us can say that they have read Szentkuthy? That they are familiar with his works? Purely in view of their quantity, to say nothing of the complex style and the difficulties of comprehension, that is no trivial matter. "Why are they not more compact?" an impatient reader may inquire. But it is also far from rare nowadays to encounter abuses of the concept of compactness, which is not synonymous with brevity: there are sonnets that are more voluble than Homer's epics. With Szentkuthy the content is not in disproportion to the length, but then that relation does not facilitate reading either.

Then the matter of reading, or being read, is not so simple a matter as many suppose. A writer's importance is not measured by any statistic, or even the sense of pleasure that we can gain through it. There are some widely read authors who can be read without any effort and yet still mean little to either the individual or general consciousness, whereas there are some authors whom we find difficult to read, and not much pleasure either, but one's knowledge of literature would be impoverished if one had to assume that they did not exist. There is also a cross section and a longitudinal section. In other words, there are some writers who, for one reason or another, are read by very many at any given moment, and there are others who are never read by many but over time accumulate as many readers as a best seller.

It is no shame, then, to admit that one is only patchily, even fragmentarily, acquainted with Szentkuthy. Even if all we can do is run to open one of his books every now and then and read a single page from it, those few sentences will probably

say more to us, and resonate much longer within us, than many books that we readily read but also readily forget. Just to know that Hungary has such a writer is, in itself, enriching for ourselves and for Hungarian literature as a whole.

Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics

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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Miklós Szentkuthy, *Prae: Recollections of My Career*¹



Photo by György Járday (1986)

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

¹ Szentkuthy was 68 years old when he wrote this autobiographical 'confession.' It was originally published in the journal *Új Írás* [New Writing] (May 1976) and reprinted in Miklós Szentkuthy, *Az élet faggatottja: Beszélgetések Szentkuthy Miklóssal* [Life's Interrogatee: Conversations with Miklós Szentkuthy], ed. Márton Molnár (Budapest: Hamvas Intézet, 2006) 48–63. An earlier version of this translation of Tim Wilkinson's was previously published in *Hungarian Literature Online*. (F. S.)

1. While writing Book 4 of my *Orpheus Booklets* [*Europa Minor*, publ. 1941], I started composing this condensed, abbreviated form of c.v., and a bitterly smiling grimace of comico-tragedies “became impressed” (to use that old-fashioned expression) on my face: in the lower years at grammar school, I regularly received the ‘low’ mark of 2, in the subjects of religious instruction, history, and Hungarian language. In my young days, can the Muses that stood by the cradle of my *Orpheus* really have been so wretched and ironic? When one of my main works is constructed on precisely the pillars of ecclesiastical and secular history, the most savage morality and the literary arts? “A fine start,” I might say a little vulgarly.

2. At school I had an excessive dread of teachers (except individual idols and idealized figures), and, with similar horror and repulsive force, I never liked studying. Similar fears made me avoid befriending boys who liked sports, dancing, the cadet force or fighting; I spent a lot of time playing, mostly, even at that age, my own theatrical ‘compositions’, but strictly with girls of the same age as myself, and since then, for my entire life, women have galloped with striking disproportion, in exceptional positions, through my fate; but both then and now I was and am acutely aware of who is worth anything, who just something, and who nothing at all; that hierarchy was, and has remained, rock-solid and unshakeable. Of course the ‘*dramatis personae*’ and plots, when they are manifested, are the province of memoirs from beyond the grave, not in the sort of recollections that are pulsing under my pen right now.

3. During my later years at school I became top at Latin, with almost naïve, Renaissance *furor*, and many was the time that Dániel Zimányi — “Uncle Dani” as he will remain to me for ever — joked that I was going to be an archdiocesan coadjutor or some similar figure in the Church bureaucracy — and with right of succession, “*cum jure successionis*,” at that.

4. At the national essay competition in 1926, for which I prepared with high-strung reading of “everything” about philology, I won first prize in Hungarian literary history for an essay on a subject that was almost expressly *not* tailored to me: “The figure of the Gypsy in Hungarian literature.” This distinction was (at least in part) the reason why I enrolled with the Faculty of Arts at university; my father was only consoled by the thought that this way I might become a university don and thereby gain the right to be addressed as ‘your honor.’

5. The competition's chief judge (or maybe rather: rabid chief inquisitor) was Jenő Pintér, district royal inspector of schools. The first prize gave me the right to choose what topics I could be asked about in all subjects except Latin and Greek; I imagined myself to be an out-and-out Metternich (given that Pintér was also chairman of the board for the final exam) for choosing to speak about Hungarian literary history, as it was Pintér's book I had used as the basis for my preparatory work for the competition. When it came round to him to ask questions he put a stop to the oration that I had assembled with a large bibliographic apparatus. Even today, I am proud of the fact that I was able to render a genuinely difficult passage from Tacitus in a near-flawless Hungarian "literary translation." This marked the start of the process that ended in [my translation of] Joyce's *Ulysses*. Pintér was an extremely irritable, hot-tempered man; László Németh once related to me with mordant humor that Pintér was only of interest as long as he kept a check on his famously touchy tonsils and they poured out only 'good' toxins into the blood; after he had them removed he turned into a lamb by comparison with the ranting of earlier days. I had occasion to experience the effect of those toxins at first hand in my own career. When *Prae* appeared (in 1934), I once bumped into him in what was then called Apponyi Square, and he gave vent to his furious disappointment with such a huge yell that virtually a whole throng clustered around us on the pavement. I had also been a disappointment for him as a schoolboy, because my Hungarian teacher at the time showed him my first poems, in one of which I spoke of the "massive piety" of the Matthias Church [on Buda's Castle Hill], and when the word "massive" was read out (and heard) he was so angry that he threw a fit. I gave cause for a similar eruption when I turned up for an audience with him wearing white flannels and a short-sleeved shirt: "This is a Royal Inspectorate of Schools, not a tennis party!" my excommunicator thundered. And while on the subject of excommunication, when our grammar school was wheeled out to greet the papal nuncio, I was not wearing a hat to doff, and the headmaster, to my shame, expelled me from the ranks.

6. The way it looked, I had been born merely to cause others disappointment. At one Hungarian literature lesson a veritable pack of school inspectors made an appearance (this was in the heyday of the Horthy era), and the teacher, seeking to show off with me, had me stand by the teacher's dais and speak about Endre Ady.² He knew that I was a Marian, and he was counting on my running Ady down dreadfully in giving my account. Whereupon I improvised a laudatory talk (not out of any heroism, purely childish unbridled enthusiasm). The upshot you can imagine.

7. My greatest joy in literature and theater was to declaim, whether as a student, teacher, or later in my lectures at the Free University in Budapest. Hundreds, even thousands, have been the times that I spouted freely with nothing more than a few key words written down on a slip of paper in my hand.

8. A decisive step in my life came in 1925 when I went with my parents on an anniversary pilgrimage to Rome, when I saw Venice, Florence, Naples, Pompei and Assisi. 17-year-old boy that I was, I was completely intoxicated by Europe's history and art; I saw details of my travel log (modest *Orpheus* seedlings) in print for the first time, in the school newspaper, "Werböczy Student Life" — the school that is nowadays named the Petöfi Gymnasium was then named after Werböczy.

9. During the years I was at secondary school and then university, I went to the theater practically every evening (this was the first such period), and later on I went with my father to every exhibition (my second big craze), after that the third was the daily visits to concerts. My voracity was just as "insane" as the trip to Italy.

10. As a result of all the theater and concerts and (an ancient habit) unsystematic reading, I was nearly always up till dawn studying, and the bracketing of having homework to do and the early hours of the morning became intertwined in me. Ever since then, I have been a dawn-time worker, but however easily the pen may fly, the awareness of compliance with duty has remained ever-present beside inspiration. Even today I recall my mother's demure, gentle question, if she saw me on the balcony with a book in my hands in the afternoon: "Is that compulsory reading?"

² Edy was the first great modernist Hungarian poet.

11. My father and mother themselves personified goodness, love, compassion, kindness, and anguished sympathy with every form of suffering — but? Just because they came across so few who were equally good towards them, their protectiveness towards me led them to the thought, and the mistrust, that a large proportion of my fellow beings were fools or knaves, stupid or evil. I lived with them for 23 years, but we never received a *guest*, we ourselves never went anywhere as guests, and I had not even a clue that such a thing as a social life existed.

12. Life, for all that, is in reality a complex entity: I ought to mention that, along with the above-outlined traits, my father was constantly dangling the image of poor ideals before me (despite my most impressionable solitude, or maybe precisely because of it): he would dearly have loved to see in his son a future prince-primate of Hungary, a chief of staff, or a prime minister. His own job was in the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education of the day, concerned with common affairs of state and church, as a result of which he was most deeply impressed by the very highest positions that he himself had not managed (for many reasons) to attain. I am lost for words to describe a scene in which what I see at the foot of Father's death bed (in 1954) are stacks of unsold copies of *Prae*. I am tormented to this day by the thought that I was the source of bitterest disappointment to one I held so dear and who was all to me.

13. My own wishes inclined me most to becoming a physician, or a Jesuit, and to this day the natural sciences remain at the center of my most passionate interest. And what about being a Jesuit? In the Jesuit-minded periodical *Magyar Kultúra* I once read a series of articles in which Father Jablonkay assembled, with the gravest liturgical researcher's unease, all the errors that [the great nineteenth-century novelist Mór] Jókai had recorded in relation to Catholic ceremonies and institutions; so when one of my teachers went into a peroration about Jókai's "universal cultivation," I wove the main threads of those articles into my essay and my oral answers in class. At the time, this was the chosen terrain for letting off my adolescent "destructiveness." I still think a lot, naturally with many changes in views, about English writers such as Evelyn Waugh, T.S. Eliot, Graham Greene (or even G.K. Chesterton) when orthodoxy or dogma means "revolutionary destructio," according to this or that fashion or notion.

14. At university, János Horváth, Professor of Hungarian Literature, had a demonic impact on me: I tried to immortalize him in a full-scale portrait in the figure of Johannes de Illyria of *Orpheus*.

15. During my university studies I became acquainted with a friend who has had a decisive influence on my life. I can thank László Vajthó for taking me, when I was still at grammar school, to editorial meetings of a periodical of the times called *Napkelet* [Sunrise]. It was from Gábor Halász that I learned how to uncover phrases, humbug, and falsities with ferocity and irony; how to unmask unmercifully age-old ‘hallowed ideals,’ to ridicule rotten romanticism; the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ sobriety of the *Times Literary Supplement* and *Criterion* in the face of the vapid stars and mists of the then-fashionable history of ideas. In place of the pompously flowery language of concert reviews, I also demanded note-by-note analysis, even if that was at the expense of polished, artistic elegance. Among the huge amount that I learned from Antal Szerb, I ought to list my real acquaintance with the eighteenth century. It was he who inspired the Casanova commentaries of *Orpheus*; the extraordinary wit and irony of the letters he wrote from Paris disciplined my adventurous intellect and passionate emotional world — his essay on *Prae* (along with Gábor Halász’s “strict and unsparingly admiring” criticism) ignited in me the fearless joy of the greatest self-confidence. In my numerous articles and talks about him, I have still not shown enough proof of my gratitude to him.

À propos my Casanova, let me relate an anecdote. The structure of my commentaries [in each book of *Orpheus*] was determined by the structure of the 1919 magnum opus of the Protestant theologian Karl Barth on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans; my bookmark was the prospectus for a Sicilian spa by the name of Cattólíca [Eraclea] above which can be seen a sexy photo of a lady in a bathing suit.

I got to know László Németh around 1932, during his *Tanú* phase, and we shared a thousand subjects, thoughts and plans, and every European question about Europe, from microbiology to abstract painting, came up for passionate discussion at his home in Upper Göd, by the Danube [just north of Budapest]. By then I was hard at work on *Prae* (I wrote that between 1931 and 1933, in parallel with my doctoral dissertation): I read several extracts out of it to Németh, and I was over the moon when he published a truly spot-on diagnosis about it in *Tanú*. I bought the issue in The University Press Bookshop, then, with a mug of pale ale before me on the terrace of the Spolarich Restaurant, read through it a hundred times, with the waiters gloating sardonically at how quickly I had become intoxicated from a harmless glass of beer. It was likewise László Németh who published a few passages from *Prae* in the first issue of the periodical *Válasz* [Response]. I linked up later on, but all the more productively and permanently, with [poet] István Vas, who was the true matchmaker between the Hungarian language and English Baroque poetry — the articles that he wrote about that most certainly gave a fairly massive shove to the suspect cart of *Orpheus*. I then

met with all my friends in the Mikes Kelemen Academy, the members of which almost without exception (and of course I am not speaking about myself) have since marked time on the erratically wind-swept porch of literary history. The Academy comprised two bare rooms in Benczúr Road, but it did have two telephones and wonderfully headed writing paper.

16. My doctoral dissertation (1931) was about Ben Jonson, from the standpoint of reality and unreality. Just a few brief words about what I meant by “unreality.” First of all, and even before that: no surreal dream *of any kind*, or cult of the sub-subconscious, but a game, a somersault, medieval initials, Chagall’s fairytale enchantments, carnival. It meant saturnalia (when the master played the role of servant, and the slave that of the owner), but these games always had a very moral basis, as do all my books. I saw, and put on show, the experimentalist playfulness of Nature, the thousand variants of sex (I also later wrote puppet plays); I was fond of the masks of exotic peoples, the art of the Mayans and Africans, never becoming detached from the iron positives of reality, the latter (as may be suspected) was not dashed off like an opportunistic curtsy, like a vulgar happy end. To this day, I sense that I too (like Nature) am merely an experiment.

17. I made a grand European tour (Paris, London, the Riviera, etc.) with my father in 1928, living in such ceaseless ecstasy that I was almost ill.

18. I married at the age of 23, with a fellow student at university becoming my wife, after we had been brought together by work on her English dissertation — “philosophically” to love, so to say. My daughter was born in 1932 and takes very much after me (some flippant remarks may be inferred).

19. I traveled on a state grant to England (many other countries as well, both before and after) to work in the British Museum on a planned dissertation for the higher doctorate to obtain an honorary lectureship: I was attracted by all the ramifications of an overall picture of the Baroque era in the seventeenth century. This was at a time of rapturous rediscovery of the Baroque era, the marriage of reason and passion in poetry — and it was the daring combination of the two that I was entranced by in the essays that I wrote about contemporary Hungarian poets (Attila József, Lőrinc Szabó, István Vas). And yet, and yet, the more often I visited the cathedrals of England and France,

that dissertation, bulky though it was, stayed forever in a fragmentary state and the almost supernatural artistic attraction of those cathedrals lured me to London to pick up the writing of *Prae*, embarked on long before; for *à la* Proust, it was in them that I found (among a million other things) ‘ultraviolet’ richness of detail and healthy composition. The latter (all hostile rumors to the contrary) is still my ideal today, but it is a gigantic, still unfinished struggle and bloody battle to harmonize the millions of atoms of impressions into a unified structure, an organism.

20. Publication of *Prae* (1934) was made possible by my wife’s financial circumstances, for which I give eternal thanks. I should mention, first and foremost, that at the time what made a far deeper impression on me than any criticism, fuss, and hoopla was a man’s face, and specifically that of the most beatific and loveable printer’s compositor who set the type for the book on the basis of my barely legible handwriting. I paid a visit to the printer a couple of weeks after its appearance, and this holy man came up to me, tears in his eyes, meekly, with evangelical modesty, and in a quiet, barely audible voice complained that it was precisely he, who had put in the most work on the book, who had not received a signed copy. My heart almost broke in mortification, and I think that never in my life did I write such a sincere love letter as in that guiltily tardy dedication.

Perhaps even now I hear the name of ‘Joyce’ being cranked out, in what is virtually a hurdy-gurdy variant, in connection with *Prae*, with even the original cover being associated with *Ulysses*, although this too is a misconception on the part of people who have never read either Joyce or myself: I simply saw in the window of the old Eggensberger bookshop the cover of an Italian periodical entitled “PAN,” and that font was the model.

21. I never, in any shape or form, considered *Prae* to be a work that belonged to an avant-garde. At most it was different from [the middle-brow] Lajos Zilahy or Ferenc Herczeg. If I had chopped the whole thing down into neat chapters, it would have become, disregarding a few (never consciously created) stylistic features, a more or less sober-minded collection of essays, diary entries, and novellas. I also visualize a naïvely romantically imaginary new edition of it the same way, though it would have the chapter titles in a detailed list of Contents (a separate booklet in 1934), or else set in the text, or in the margins. When people pigeonholed the book with ‘surrealism’ and other ‘isms,’ I felt a bit like Molière’s *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who on being taught the difference between poetry and prose, exclaims in astonishment, “Good Heavens! For

more than forty years I have been speaking prose without knowing it!" It was also on the basis of a honorable misunderstanding of *Prae* that I was invited to what was catalogued as the avant-garde "European School" — perhaps more to address them as a speaker than a proper member — and there I delivered talks on Dickens, Shakespeare, and a host of old classics, amply demonstrating that what the school fondly imagined were revolutionary innovations had also played a part, to a greater or lesser extent (better too), in the history of the arts. By the way, I felt that the style of the School's members — to the extent that I was acquainted at all with such "ultramodernists" — was outdated, supposing that if they had already shown the (dubious) whites of their teeth before the Second World War, what was the point of repeating themselves. I had a horror of any kind of manifesto, or the founding programs of any "religion" or fanatic sect, and it never occurred to me in my wildest dreams that I should be "avant-garde." When I picked up Lautréamont's *Maldoror*, for instance, that was where it stayed, to be sure; it never penetrated to my heart or brain. It was in the School that I first heard the name of Paul Klee (they owned one of his original drawings), and after *Prae* I really only got to know creative artists and theorists from the early years of the century, albeit with a host of reservations. I summed up those very definite reservations with jovial irony in an essay with the title "Children's Crusade." When I disclose my deepest gratitude to *Magyar Műhely* [Magyar Workshop] in Paris for devoting an entire special issue to my work, that gratitude is obviously not diminished by this modest observation, which I would most certainly be happy to dispute with them in an essay or two.

22. When people spoke about my "intellectualism," I somehow again felt I was being made to wear a suit that had not been tailored at all to my measure. The so-called intellectual elements ended up in my books as naturally as a folk song would, in the manner of flowers of the field that had no knowledge of "high culture" or "deep philosophy," and did not even seek it. Of course it would be foolish of me to deny or downplay "weightier" thoughts from my modest oeuvre, but I cannot fail, and I need to ring it out loudly and clearly, that I despised any sort of "intellectualism," and, just like Rabelais or Joyce, I started off on my "cultivation" superciliously, playfully, with satirical grimaces, with an irate trampling on snobs. In one of the sections of *Orpheus*, in "Palmy Days for Old Spinsters, or About Intellectualism" (in [the Catholic monthly magazine] *Vigilia*), and in one of my older essays ("Cultivation and Literature") I set out, and illustrated with examples, that I am a thousand, a hundred thousand times more attracted to the simple thinking of simple people than to any philosophically overdressed or moldy tendencies. The scholarly theologian Saint Bonaventura thought

more highly of the faith of an illiterate old woman than of the tatty libraries of any worlds or heavens. That may be one of the reasons why I never, in all my born days, felt myself to be a “pro,” an accredited writer, just “an interrogatee of life,” the humblest child in the forest, who, every now and then, senses something and ponders.

23. Whether it seems contradictory or not, during my travels and while working on *Prae*, I was reading Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*. It would be totally beside the point for me to digress here on his errors, but I had to put the name down because while I was writing *Prae*, and *Orpheus* was in an advanced state of germination, it proved an excellent love potion — and in two respects. Firstly, the dancing “thousand and one nights of cultures” (was that a dance of death or an orgy?) drove my raging imagination even more wild; secondly, I was magnetically hypnotized by the most biological view and dissection of the phenomena of life, both then and to the present day.

24. Humorous anecdotes are much more interesting than any sort of “*ars poetica*,” so how about this: when I was at the very start of my career as a teacher I had an idiotic colleague who was in part a maniacal bigot, in part a crafty hypocrite, and he stuck to me like a leech, being obsessed with the idea of enticing me to go on a spiritual retreat, like Ignatius of Loyola to Manresa. His first siren song was to persuade me to dedicate a copy of *Prae* to the director of the retreat, Father Révay S.J., which I duly did, whereupon the colleague literally took me by the arm and sneaked me into the director’s study, where he placed *Prae* very handsomely among the devotional pictures, crucifixes, theological treatises, and colorful fetishes brought back by missionaries to the Orient, so that even today I tremble to think what could have been the fate of my poor *Prae* in such surroundings... My other little story is that at the time the book was published, I was invited to be interviewed by a newspaper reporter at the ‘Országház’ (Parliament) coffee house, and when I duly turned up in the divine presence beside the velvet divan, he proceeded to give me a good scolding; no-one was going to treat him like an idiot or an object of fun: he was not going to make a report on a boy, only with my father, which is to say the real author of *Prae*.

25. My reason for publishing *Towards the One and Only Metaphor* (1935) was to show that I was not some kind of papier-mâché, abstract and crazy, plastic homunculus but a living, flesh-and-blood, natural human being. Ever since then I have produced similar notes (with greater or lesser differences) right up to the present moment, of which notes 40,000 pages (Diary) are now under lock and key in the safekeeping of the National Széchényi Library. In the very first paragraph of *Metaphor* I wrote that the aim of my writings was a *Catalogus rerum*, an Index of everything in the Entire World: not a single novel in isolation, but a mirror of the world that takes in everything. I am very clear that the goal has a certain naivety (and perhaps even more certainly, an air of impossibility) about it, but I find it impossible to renounce or repudiate the *intention*. The huge panorama of the twentieth century stands before me like a peremptory model, the world of Marx, Einstein, Freud, Schoenberg, etc., etc., never in some gaudy art-for-art's-sake display, without any sort of compass needle, but in frantically full knowledge of the historical, intellectual, and artistic scale of values and hierarchy.

26. It is no accident, therefore, to declare that this is the place for my crying and screaming confession that the alpha and omega of every pronouncement I make is morality, the very highest social and individual morality (it is very evident that in the Middle Ages I would have written "morality plays"). I am put in mind of an episode in my 1936 novel, *A Chapter About Love*: one of the protagonists (later to become pope?) is waiting for a meeting with his lover, but when from a balcony he sees her turning cruelly away from a beggar, he murders the lady of his heart. (Anyone who thinks that I have gullibly done with my agitation for social morality by handing out alms is doubly or triply blind!)

Let me record here, under the heading of morality, that a group of my girl pupils (the prettiest as well as the brightest, miracles will never cease) always pays me a visit on my birthday and my name day: for me this is not just the most rainbow-hued fashion show, but also a great manifestation of affection and fidelity that I myself am fondest of and to which I am most faithfully attached.

It gave me extraordinary pleasure that László Németh and Károly Szalay both spotted in my work the dominant tonic of the most humane humanism. What else is the very end of *Metaphor*: "Towards the one and only metaphor? Why should my fate not be exactly the opposite: out of a million metaphors towards the one and only — *person*?" Even when I was writing my satirical-clownish puppet plays, that sentence's decisive weight and content was the only one with any validity: they were Morality Plays, as I suggested earlier.

27. Very few will be in a position to guess from the books I have published to date how intimately I experienced, on my skin, in my bones, viscerally, in my eyes and in my touch, through the most immediate family connections, a cross-section, maybe an entire (dreadful) cross-section, of Hungarian society: on my father's side, a whole gaggle of dim-witted, title-crazed leisured gentry, bedaubed and plastered with decorations from head to toe, whereas on my mother's side were the figures and slum dwellings of impoverished milliners, factory dyers and curriers, concierges on the look out for door-keeping tips, proprietors of provincial haberdashery shops. These contradictory impressions had such a deep and, to this day, subversively disturbing effect that I did not dare to express it (does not anyone feel the same who feels what can be said with words?) in the most convincing form: by full and frank confession.

28. Before bringing out the first of the *Orpheus Booklets* (1939), I collected subscribers by literally going door-to-door with prospectuses, and of course, instead of subscribers, I got sob stories from family men reaching for my pocket and my heart. It was again my wife who helped to publish all the same: the dedication "ad D" preserves the first letter of her Christian name.

A sob-story intermezzo: I was just about to pay a visit to a wealthy acquaintance with my "alms-begging" list of subscribers when who but this acquaintance should step out of the lift. When I asked him to pay 2 pengő 80 fillér every three or four months he clapped his hands together and went into an act about living on the breadline, gaping his mouth as if he were a fledgling in the nest waiting for its food — he, the pauper, could not find a scrap to feed his starving young, so how could I even think of asking him to pay out 2 pengő 80 fillér every three or four months for my absurdities!

I started the prospectus for the first of the *Orpheus Booklets* with the following text:

The work, larger continuous installments of which will appear quarterly, comprises an interlocking Essay series. At the beginning of each chapter there will be a longer or shorter life of a saint, and, appended to that, historical essays, extracts from a novel, short stories, lyrical poems and aphorisms that are connected with aspects of the life and times of the saint who stands at the chapter head. The designation 'Breviary' in the title refers to this manner of composition. The name "Orpheus" expresses the underlying conceptual tone: Orpheus wandering in the underworld is an eternal symbol of the brain straying among the dark secrets of reality. The aim of the work is, firstly, to portray the reality of nature and history with ever more extreme precision,

and secondly, to display through variations in the history of the European mind an observer's every uncertainty, the fickleness of emotions, the tragic sterility of thoughts and philosophical systems. The reason for placing the epithet "Saint" before "Orpheus" is because the work seeks to portray both European history and the vegetative world of nature from an essentially religious, supernatural viewpoint. Although both the lives of the saints, as well as the other figures, famous books and cultural manifestations of history are, in point of fact, nothing more than different features of a lyrical self-portrait, the various roles and masks of the author as it were, the work is in essence "religious," because from love to politics the emphasis throughout is on the battle of the body-politic of God and the body-politic of the world.

The part works, each approx. 100-150 pages in length, will not display the day-by-day arrangement of a breviary as this would pose technical difficulties with issuing what, as far as possible, will be booklets of uniform length. One such booklet (in the same format as the present leaflet) will appear every three or four months at a price of pengő 2.80 per booklet. The first section, due to appear in early April is:

Széljegyzetek Casanovához [*Marginalia on Casanova*];

(A picture of the literature, society, and art of the eighteenth century via the *Memoirs* [of Casanova]);

the next three planned booklets are:

Ágoston olvasása közben [*While Reading St. Augustine*]

(the antique myth, the Old Testament and Christianity, and finally the balance of European history);

Vázlatok Tudor Erzsébet ifjúkori arcképehez [*Sketches for a Portrait of Elizabeth Tudor of England as a Girl*]

Orpheus tíz álarca [*The Ten Masks of Orpheus*]

(that is, ten chapter-head lives of saints).

I published a second introduction after the first six booklets had been published, at the head of an index of contents of the parts so far:

The goal of *Orpheus*: to find the human ideal and the most acceptable lifestyle that the reflective cerebrum and happiness-seeking sentiment could wish for after the widest-ranging historical, the most universal religious, and the most profound natural-scientific experiences. Its goal, therefore, is most unmistakably a humanist goal: to seek what is human beyond every variant of culture, every promise and failure of sciences and mythologies, beyond the remotest eras and most distant lands; psychology's myriad and yet finite shades: what is left behind out of all these masses of experiences? What will be usable in future? What part is the play of time, and what the indispensable essence and possibly eternal positive?

29. The "Baroque," that much-remarked epithet both before my name and after, is truly justified, because if a mirroring, imitation, and variation of the *whole* World (unbridled ambition) was my goal, dangling with everlasting pubertal or "Faustian" enthusiasm, what else could I be but "Baroque," because that Goethean "*ganze Welt*" is composed of thousands and hundreds of thousands of elements, history is virtually inexhaustible, and vegetating Nature itself chose as its one and only path the "Baroque" kaleidoscope and waxworks, with its irresistible "crazy" fantasy in every flower, animal, and mineral. My thousand-faced "Baroque" temperament stretches back into earliest childhood: it was only able to find its most consistently insatiable and nourishing expression in plays of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras and the Spanish Baroque.

30. It is part of the nature of the paradox of man (my self) that (the bluff, however surprising it may sound, is always exiled to inexpressible distances from me): part of this paradox is my near-religious attraction (I have already indicated as much) to simplicity. Among my happiest of all minutes are the letters that I have received from my sharpest-eyed readers who informed me — much more elegantly than this — that "for all that you swagger, holler like a newspaper vendor, or strut about in fancy dress, dear Szentkuthy, on the steps of Baroque altars and amidst iridescently, opalescently colorful, overcrowded scenery, we (—the exceptional readers—), hear your heart beating *more loudly*: at the sight of the Nativity shepherds, lambs, cattle and donkeys, like most hallowed Spain among the lushly proliferating, magic, near-demented flora and ecstatic stone fauna." The moral continuation of my childhood fantasies (luxury and poverty): the love and company of the simplest people, my biased thirst for the most elemental forms of life, my almost hypnotic attraction for the folk-tale serving of justice to the victorious poor. This eternal and indeflectable path of mine towards

simplicity. I do also have, to be sure, a theoretical or scientific goal that is relevant here: to filter out from the world's apparent chaos the simplest fundamental laws, the most comprehensive common denominators, and axiom-solid formulae in the way that the greatest historians, astronomers, and psychologists do.

31. It follows, naturally, that in spite of all the colorful theater dressing rooms, I was never, in all my life, a wisecracking jester, never a culture vulture, never a frivolous fair-ground merry-go-round chaser; I belong far, far rather among the prophets who preach moral judgment with lashing Last Judgments and knowledge of the promises of ultimate justice to be dispensed in paradise.

32. The aforementioned colorful stage outfits and activities of mine do not, therefore, contradict my hunger for simplicity and morality. My grandfather's brother, under the name Alsdorf, was an actor, stage director, owner of a great many theaters (he spent his entire inheritance on that), and a theater manager, playing in the German-language theaters of Pest and Buda, so there was someone to take after and something to inherit.

I once turned up at a masked ball as Casanova, in a silver periwig and floor-length black satin cloak, and I felt marvelous in it, while my friends joked that I was now in my true element, and my everyday wear was my disguise.

While the Eucharistic World Congress was taking place in Budapest [in 1938], I had a cardinal's chasuble and biretta made up of scarlet silk by a slightly surprised family seamstress, round my neck was a rosary of walnut-sized, lathe-turned wooden beads (crucifix at the end), and on my right hand (for want of anything better) a large black signet ring, and on the bridge of my nose frameless clerical eyeglasses. I went that evening by taxi to my friends, chatting with my wife in French; the taxi driver fell to his knees before me and kissed my ring, while I, at his request, bestowed on him an "Apostolic" benediction. Later on the opportunity arose for a much more stylish benediction when I went off with a big party at dawn to march to the top of Little Swabian Hill in Buda, where I climbed up a ladder to the "balcony" on top of the triangulation point (I delivered a speech as well) and, arms outstretched and making signs of the cross, I bestowed my blessing on the kneeling faithful. Mihály Babits' wife photographed me in that cardinal's get-up and made colored slides. I knew a great deal about her life at that time; apart from the "cardinal craze" it was no everyday performance for me to give Latin lessons to her adopted daughter, Ildikó, in Mrs. Babits' kitchen, where there was a small school desk (on some occasions I too would

squeeze myself into it, with my discomfort accompanied by gales of laughter), but what really interfered with the acquisition of declinations were some half a dozen budgerigars that flitted around the kitchen, so that my pupil inclined to this better part rather than to Livy.

Shortly after my father's death (1954), the director of the school where I was teaching entrusted me with producing a comic stage work with the help of the boys and girls who were my pupils. That was the last thing I wanted during that time of great sorrow, and I tried all I could to refuse, but the school's director would not hear of it: we were to play in a competition and he, with my acting and theatrical assistance, wanted our school to win the competition. I chose Molière's *A Doctor in Spite of Himself*. Seldom in all my life have I ever submerged myself so deeply, or with such extreme fervor, into artistic work as I did then, in my mourning black. In conducting the rehearsals for all the roles, I myself must have played them a hundred times over, and even today I am amazed how my pupils managed to play with such startling near-perfection and also be so light-hearted about appearing on stage in public. (I set out the vast range of burlesque aspects of hiring costumes in a novella with the title *Doomsday at the Costume Hire Shop*.) It was a huge success, even with that blackest conceivable, negative portent. Not only did we win, but they hauled me up before a bloody assizes at a teachers' confab (on account of the scandalous immorality of Molière's play, no less!), with the ethical outrage of the father of one of the girls who had a role being the cause of the inquisition. And why? Because the doctor in spite of himself traces in the air on the stage, yards away from her, the feminine curves of the chambermaid.

I have left the most resounding punch-line to the end: together with my friends, male and female, for years on we only ever played *commedia dell'arte* pieces, with me writing a brief scene-setting and then all of us improvising for hours on end.

33. In essence, the work involved in my books on Mozart, Haydn, Handel, Dürer and Luther was purely theatrical; they were my characters, combining my most subjective intellectual sympathies with the most objective historical reality. To confess yet another pipe dream, it is as if, by a miracle, they should one day all be published together as an omnibus edition, I would entitle it 'Self-Portrait in Masks' (that is a thought I have been carrying for several decades). That would apply as much to my great fondness for acting as does the mathematically precise title of *Definitions and Roles* that was given to my [1969] volume of essays.

The most moving and finest recollections are bound up with my casting as "Haydn." In order that not the tiniest error should creep into its technical accuracy, I

approached my long-time friend, [the musicologist] Bence Szabolcsi, with the aim of getting him to take me through all of Haydn's late string quartets, note by note, from consonance to dissonance, with the aid of a piano. He did so, with tearful pride (literally), but when he wanted to play through the parts for first and second violin together with me, as a four-hander, my lack of practice in reading full scores and playing the piano naturally rendered this an impossibility. He personally played through and explained everything (I took more or less shorthand notes), and while he was at it, after the most thorough exertions, he told me how Bartók had been one of the very first customers for *Prae*. Having himself looked at the text, Bartók proceeded to draw his friends' attention to it, so they might dip into it, just in case there was something genuinely novel in the seemingly hostile text. Szabolcsi also encouraged me to write a book about Bartók, but naturally humility and modesty held me back from doing so.

They were no hindrance to such role-playing, however, with my translations of Swift, Dickens, and Joyce's *Ulysses*, where I again had the opportunity to play with voracious zeal all the roles that suited, and stood closest to, my complex body and soul.

34. Two anecdotes connected with *Orpheus*, one distinctly uncomfortable, the other especially reassuring. To start with, the first issue (*Casanova*) had barely come out when something else — an almost illegibly typewritten scrap of paper — made an appearance at the Madách Gymnasium, where I was working at the time as the most novice of probationary teachers. It was an official document that communicated the heart-warming fact (1930) that the public prosecutor's office was "laying charges" against my *Casanova* specifically for offending against public decency and affronting religious sentiment. (It was no mean feat, after that had been delivered to my hands, to go on and give two English lessons on the poetry of Shelley and Keats.) How had I offended against public decency? By the following: "... The streets in Venice are narrow, windows are vast and thus, in mystic comfort ... it is possible to spy in on a woman, into her home, her boudoir, her soup and her wash basin." In what way had I trampled on religion? By way of introduction, I ought to mention that in section 11 of the book I write about how, when Casanova was a child, it was customary in Venice (at New Year?) for the sermon to be given, in memory of Jesus' own childhood, not by an ordained priest but by a Venetian child, which tickled me to no end. At the place where I was open to prosecution I expressed this by, among other things, the following: "We cannot help but think that Casanova was entitled to deliver the sermon, and that what is happening here is perfectly logical, quite free of hypocrisy. It is God's will that the sermon should be delivered, not by St. John, bearded and in the

wilderness, but by a lovelorn rascal...” So how had the newfangled censor and the public prosecutor’s office turned that against me? “M. Sz. is teaching Christian Hungary that the sermons in church should not be delivered by professional priests but scoundrels.” In my naivety I rushed off to get a defense lawyer, and naturally could find no one who was willing to take on my case, so that in the end the Attorney General’s office had to appear on my behalf, a taking of my side that consisted of getting the charges against me dropped, but at the cost of having distribution of my book banned. In 1940-42, with the war in progress, I only had to submit to the censor a typescript of anything I wanted to publish, and to my no little surprise, they did not even bother looking at this but mindlessly slapped on, every 20 pages, the blue stamp authorizing publication, with the most eloquent “imprimatur” being given, for instance, to an imagined Chinese story that was a barely disguised scathing parody of Hitlerism!

What about the tale that bears the motto ‘All’s well that ends well’? By then I was teaching at the economics technical college in Márvány Road, and on the corridor I noticed a very attractive lady entering one classroom after another in the company of the school’s director. He hastily whispered to me that I should hold a class as snappily as I could, because the lady was a school inspector. That alone was scary enough, but what was a hundred times more terrifying was that I happened to catch sight of one of the black-covered *Orpheus Booklets* under her arm. I thought that must surely mean the game was up for my teaching career. I held the lesson in a state of near trance-like high anxiety (at least that is how I recall it), and then what? Then came the redeeming surprise: the school inspectress was not carrying my *Orpheus* as a black shroud cloth, so to speak, but because she wished to speak with me as a very perceptive and thorough reader friend. I think that was the most colossal of all the imaginable heavy stones that was ever lifted from my trembling heart.

35. In the years following Liberation [13 April 1945], I did a huge amount of work for periodicals and the radio, and gave many lectures to the Free University. Among the things that appeared in *Magyarok* [‘Hungarians’]³ was my essay on Thomas Mann, which, behind my back, had been sent to the editor in a scintillating German translation by a female literary reader, and Mann’s marvelous response to it, which was published in the papers of the day in Hungarian. The German text, along with Thomas Mann’s letter, appeared in *Sinn und Form* in Berlin. It was also in *Magyarok*

³ Short-lived literary critical journal, April 1945-April 1949; via its editors and contributors a post-war successor of *Nyugat*.

that the first short story that I ever published appeared, following the six *Orpheus Booklets*, and I read it out in the honorable company of 30 Hungarian writers who had been gathered together by Dezső Keresztúry, Minister of Education at the time, after which László Kéry [then editor of *Magyarok*] asked me for a copy in a quite amazing setting as I had been bombed out of my home on Sun Hill in Buda and, out of force of necessity, had moved into what passed for a “flat” on Böszörményi Street, on the fifth floor and with practically no roof left over it — we did not have enough umbrellas, parasols, buckets and basins in our possession to protect against the veritable floods that resulted whenever it rained.

One unforgettable memory I have is of one of the meetings (perhaps the first) of the editorial board of the journal *Válasz* [‘Response’] in the cellar of the Central Café [in the center of Pest]; swirling in the air like half-chilled cigarette smoke, even that early on, was a fairly crude distinction between “Populist” (or ‘Agrarian’) and “Urbanist” writers, with Gyula Illyés as a good-humored host and with good-humored comments — he seated me beside Péter Veres at the board’s head table. Those who worked on *Magyar Csillag* [Hungarian Star]⁴ met every Monday in a private room at the Dunacorso Café. Illyés again played the part of “form-master” with good humor. It was here, in the most threatening shadow of war, that I last had a chance to meet many of my great friends. Each such never-to-be-forgotten Monday afternoon and evening was always like a three-acter in my life. The first act was the vivid literary encounter, after which came a walk with one of my writer friends or another along the deserted, blacked-out Buda bank of the Danube (Gábor Halász, in his immortal bowler hat, talked about the necessity for realism and Paul Valéry’s cobweb-wispy, over-refined aphorisms), with, as the final act, the adolescently full retailing of everything in a sparkingly lit drawing room, in dazzling female company, behind heavy black-out curtains.

36. In 1948, at virtually the same time, I was awarded the Baumgarten Prize and also a grant to travel to England. The Ministry of Education’s plan was to set up with the English, on a contractual basis, posts as “Hungarian language instructor” at the University of London or Oxford or Cambridge, with Gábor Devecseri as the first instructor, alongside my puny self, as the first assistants. My trip was supposed to have something to do with preparing for this, but the plan came to nothing. Instead of working as a language instructor, I roamed round half of England, with cathedrals

⁴ An earlier short-lived literary critical journal, October 1941-April 1944; immediate successor of *Nyugat*.

remaining my “burning” obsession. This was a period when Mrs. Károlyi was still spending a lot of her time in England.⁵ She was well acquainted with the poet Dylan Thomas and the impossible circumstances in which he lived, and she agreed with me that I should try and get my essay on Joyce, which by then had even appeared in Swedish, also published in an English version, with my wife doing a fair English translation and Dylan Thomas being asked by letter if he could see his way to putting it into full-blooded English. Dylan Thomas was not willing to do that, but he did send an extraordinarily polite reply; Mrs. Károlyi had already brought his poetry to my attention in Pest, and it was a deadly serious, stubborn thrill for me to get to understand his poetry just for its own sake. Mrs. Károlyi therefore took me to a reading at which T.S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas in tandem read out their works. The two of them together made much the same impression on me as if Goethe and Verlaine had shared a platform in a dream. It was also she who took me to a big underground exhibition hall on Oxford Street, where all the surrealists in the world were holding council on the walls, and this was in all truth where I first became acquainted with them, which did nothing to alter my long-held reservations and wish to keep at a distance.

37. On the other hand, what decisively and most crucially changed my life was the year 1955, which saw the establishment, under the direction of Géza Képes, of the Magvető Publishing Co. He commissioned me to write a novel about Mozart for the upcoming bicentenary of his birth. I was 47, and this was the very first book that not I but (wonder of wonders!) a publisher would be bringing out, with the emoluments that befitted a writer. It was also to Magvető that I owed the subsequent publication (with a redoubling of the initial magic) of all three volumes to date of the *St. Orpheus Breviary*.

⁵ Née Katalin Andrassy (1892–1985), was the wife of Mihály Károlyi (1875–1955), the ex-president of Hungary (1918–19). After 1919, they lived in exile first in Italy, then in France, and eventually ended up England until they returned to Hungary (briefly) in 1946, when her husband became ambassador to Paris (1947–49).

38. Having reached the end of the perfunctory record of these highly fragmentary and selective shards of memory, one thing that is constantly passing through my head in connection with my consciousness and work as a writer is that the title “Recollections of My Career” somehow does not fit at the head of these pages; that the title *Prae* would still be a more appropriate title. In the midst of my grueling struggles, I feel I am still only at the very beginning of carving out my own distinctive genre and mature form.

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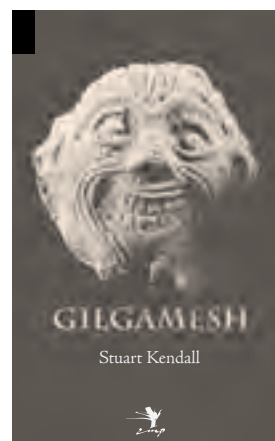
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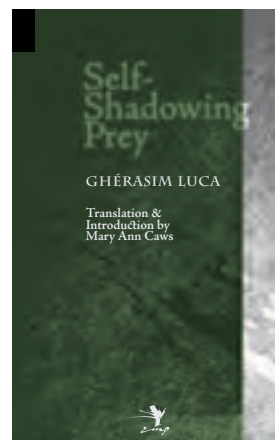
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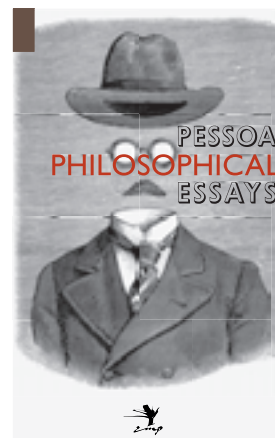
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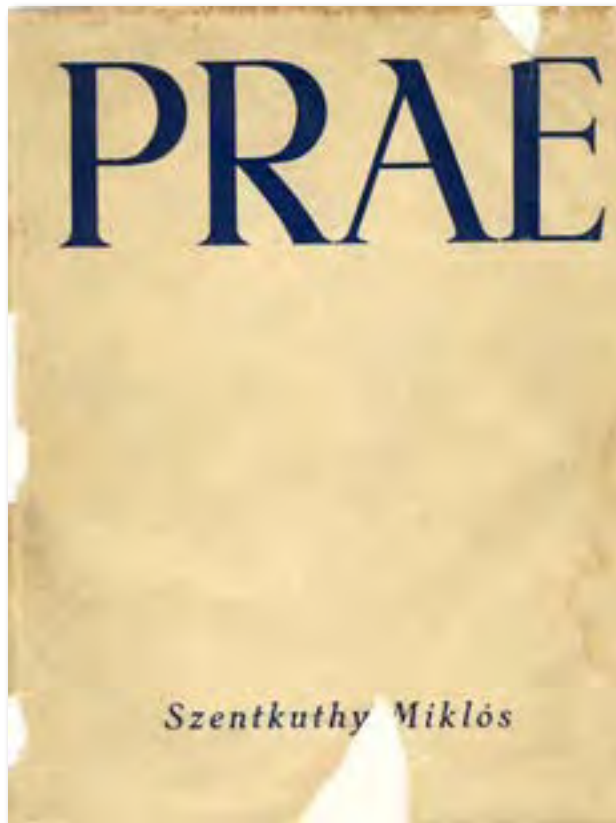


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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Introductory Remarks on
Miklós Szentkuthy's
PRAE



The cover of the first edition of *Prae* (1934)

Filip Sikorski

Background

In the summer of 1928, a young Hungarian student set out on a journey with his father around the countries of Occidental Europe. The student's name was Miklós Pfisterer but since 1927 he had already been using the name Miklós Szentkuthy as his *nom de plume*.¹ They went via Vienna to Paris after which they headed north, across the English Channel, to London. Next, having returned to France, they traveled southwards to the Riviera where they visited Cannes, Nizza, Monaco, and Menton. Then, they continued to Italy, and via Milan, Venice, and Trieste returned to Budapest. The Grand Tour left an indelible mark on the young student. This is how he described his experience many years later:

In 1928, at the age of twenty, my father and I made a great tour of Europe. [...] I absorbed "everything": cities, cathedrals, existential philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and modern theoretical physics, psychoanalysis, mythology. Luxurious nightclubs, theology, women's fashion, ultramodern architecture, historical comedies, women and romances, exhibitions, concerts: this was my everyday life. Beauty of every landscape, biology of animals and plants, experimental theaters, museums night and day.²

Already some years before the Grand Tour Szentkuthy had been planning to write a novel, but it was during the summer of 1928 that his ideas finally crystallized when he envisioned writing a monumental work displaying a panorama of European culture of the twenties. Upon his return to Budapest in autumn of 1928, Szentkuthy began a literary project that ended in May 1934 with the publication of one of the most esoteric novels in Hungarian literature: *Prae*. Cognate with the English prefix *pre*, the novel's title is a Latin word meaning "before." It implies that the book is only a preface, or a prelude to the author's future works.

With his ambition to depict the totality of the world of the nineteen-twenties, Szentkuthy's project draws on the tradition of great encyclopedic narratives such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Balzac's *Human Comedy*. However, numerous innovations in

¹ The name Szentkuthy is derived from Szentkút, a small village located northwest of Budapest, which the author found in a railway timetable; the name of the village means "holy well," hence "Szentkuthy" can be literally translated as "of the holy well."

² Miklós Szentkuthy, *Prae* (Budapest: Magvető, 1980) vol. 1, cover text. All translations are mine except where otherwise stated – F. S.

narrative form situate *Prae* amongst the masterpieces of literary Modernism, such as *Ulysses* or *In Search of Lost Time*. An encyclopedic novel in a modernist guise, *Prae* is written in a language of exceptional beauty, which combines elements of poetic prose, philosophical reflection, and scientific treatise. All these qualities make it one of the most remarkable novels in European literature of the early twentieth century.

First rejected as unreadable, then hailed as a forerunner of the *nouveau roman*, *Prae* includes over six hundred pages (over one thousand pages in the second edition) of dense philosophical analyses interspersed with vivid descriptions of the French Riviera. Unread by the wider public, the novel is also one of the most under researched works in Hungarian literature. Its reception is in many ways similar to the reception of *Ulysses* before the publication of Stuart Gilbert's guide: although acknowledged as one of the most important works of Modernism, *Prae* still remains *terra incognita*.

Without pretending to be a comprehensive exegesis of the novel (such work still remains to be written), this article will present a brief introduction to *Prae*.³ Due to space and time limitations, I shall restrict myself to dealing with only four themes. In the first section, I present a brief synopsis of the novel.⁴ In the second section, I discuss the main theme of *Prae*, which is the search for affinities and analogies between various phenomena of 1920s and 30s European culture. In the third section, I show that the novel is composed out of loosely connected segments and therefore it can be read in a non-linear way. In the fourth section, I focus on Szentkuthy's innovation in narrative technique, which consists in the impossibility of distinguishing between the narrator's and the characters' voices.

Plot Summary

Prae recounts the story of a prostitute named Leatrice who moves out of the nightclub *Perspective* (where she was previously living) to a hotel room, from where she contemplates the sea and reminisces about her past. The novel's focus, however, is not on

³ For readers unfamiliar with Hungarian, two other introductions are available: Ferenc Takács, "A Comedy of Ideas: Miklós Szentkuthy: *Prae*," *Hungarian Literature Online* (May 1, 2012) http://www.hlo.hu/news/miklos_szentkuthy_prae, accessed August 31, 2012; and Gyula Sipos, "PRAE: Dissémination et Montage du roman," *Le nouveau commerce*, No. 38 (autumn 1977) 121–131.

⁴ A sort of synopsis is available also in Hungarian: Dénes Zoltai, "PRAE," in *66 híres magyar regény*, ed. Éva Székely (Budapest: Móra, 1992) 442–451.

the development of plot but on the analysis of various phenomena of European culture of the 1920s and 30s. With the plot reduced to a bare minimum, *Prae* consists mostly of the characters' and the narrator's monologues, which explore a wide spectrum of themes as diverse as Bergson's and Heidegger's philosophy, Bauhaus architecture, interior design, haute couture, mathematics, quantum physics, novel writing, love, and sexuality

The novel opens with a prefatory chapter⁵ that includes a résumé of four articles written by one of the main protagonists, Leville-Touqué, a French philosopher, writer, and editor-in-chief of a periodical called *Antipsyché*. In the first article, entitled *Outline of a Starting-Point, or New Composition*, Touqué analyses the process of literary creation starting from the first sensory stimulus (a hat seen in a shop window) up until the finished text. In the second article (*Towards a New Culture of Play on Words, or About the Rules of Dogmatic Accidentalism*), Touqué discusses his theory of "play on words." Having christened a hypochondriac woman writer *Hippopochondra Stylopotama*, a portmanteau word that combines "hypochondriac," "stylo," and "hippopotamus," Touqué proceeds to formulate the principles of his ontology, according to which all phenomena in the world can be understood by the phrase "play on words." In the third article, entitled *Man-Style and Man-Sache*, Touqué theorizes a new type of novel in which the protagonist's soul and body would be described in separate sections. The fourth article (*Elegance and Schisma Moralis*) also deals with the possibilities of novel writing: while the traditional novels include both description of milieu and story line, in the future, postulates Touqué, there will be separate milieu-novels and story-novels.

At the beginning of chapter 2 we encounter two English students, Halbert and Anny, on a summer morning in the city of Cannes. They are on their way to *Perspective*, a nightclub where Leatrice Achariol-Zaninoff — the central character of *Prae* — has her apartment. Leatrice is a Russian Jewish interior designer who works as a prostitute in *Perspective* but wishes to quit her job and begin a new, spiritual life. As Halbert and Anny arrive at *Perspective* they meet Leville-Touqué and Leatrice's friend Ena. The story is then interrupted by Touqué's interior monologue, which lasts for more than 160 pages and does not conclude until the end of chapter 4. At the beginning of the monologue, Touqué

⁵ When *Prae* appeared in 1934, it was divided into three parts. In the second (1980) and third edition (2004), the tripartite division was abolished: the book appeared in two volumes subdivided into fourteen chapters, so that part 1, 2, and 3 became respectively chapters 1–8, chapters 9–13, and chapter 14. The following synopsis takes into account both divisions.

compares the nature of teenage and mature desire: while a teenager wants nothing more than to possess a woman's body, a mature man — that is, Touqué himself — also appreciates the social game that precedes intercourse. The monologue is intersected with three italicized sections that have no connection with the main line of thoughts. In the first section, entitled *Interpolation*, the author declares that he has failed to give an accurate description of his interior experience. He will, however, attempt to express it indirectly, by intersecting the text of the novel with italicized passages, so-called *Non-Prae-diagonals* ("Non-Prae" is a term coined by Szentkuthy that denotes his inexpressible inner world). The second italicized passage (that is, the *First Non-Prae-diagonal*) describes a man waking up at dawn in a hotel at the Riviera and going out to the beach. Chapter 2 closes with the *Second Non-Prae-diagonal*, which describes the emotional predicament of a man (Szentkuthy's alter ego?) trapped in a love "quadrangle" with three women: his wife and two lovers.

In chapter 3, Touqué continues the monologue but abandons the analysis of desire and looks back into his childhood. In a series of flashbacks, he reminisces about his parents, his mother's boutique in Cannes, his mental illness and a stay in a clinic, a morning in Cannes when he was sent to fetch a dress from the boutique to the seamstress, and another morning when he observed the Riviera landscape from the window of his bathroom. Touqué's memories are interrupted by one more italicized passage, the *Third Non-Prae-diagonal*, in which a woman named Yvonne calls her lover to cancel their rendezvous because she is going to confession.

Chapter 4 begins with a description of a landscape by Jacques Bournol, a fictional painter. After observing that the components of the picture, although situated next to each other, lack a unifying perspective, Touqué tries to apply a similar technique to interpret human actions. He begins by describing a scene in a cloakroom after a concert: a man takes his coat and notices a woman in the throng. These events seem to be interconnected, says Touqué, but in reality there is no continuity between them. In order to prove his argument, he associates the events with two totally different images: taking a coat brings to mind a story of man whose lover shot herself in a hotel room while the woman in the throng is associated with a silent nocturnal landscape. At the end of chapter 4, the difference of two styles of desire (teenage and adult) is recapitulated.

In chapter 5 Touqué's monologue finally comes to an end and we are back at *Perspective* where Ena, Touqué, Halbert, and Anny discuss Leatrice's decision to abandon her job. Ena supports Leatrice, whereas Touqué, Halbert, and Anny accuse her of hysteria and pseudo-mysticism. The protagonists' discussion is regularly interspersed with Leville-Touqué's reflections about Leatrice. At the end of the discussion, Ena calls a taxi, and together with Leatrice they leave *Perspective*. In the taxi, Leatrice recollects her childhood at the Russian countryside where she lived until she was nineteen. Leatrice's memories are followed by an important narratorial comment about the function of the retrospection technique: the aim of the flashback is not to provide information about Leatrice's past, but to present Leatrice in a new milieu. For a short moment we are back in the taxi with Leatrice and Ena, but soon we shift into Ena's memories of her scholarship to Norway: she recollects her stay in an extravagant clinic run by a group of lesbians engaged in a cult of the female body. Finally, two friends arrive at the hotel, where Leatrice decides to rent a room with a sea view. In front of the hotel they meet two girls, Yvonne Valmian and Hilde Strauss, who turn out to be Leatrice's new neighbors.

In chapter 6 we are introduced to three side characters: first, the beautiful and elegant Veronica Chamaedrys, who is one of the hotel guests; then, her friend Ulva di Chara; finally, Ulva's boyfriend, who breaks up with her after making love with her in the forest during a torrential rain. As the chapter closes, we return to Leatrice, who concludes she would rather be with Halbert than with Leville-Touqué.

At the beginning of chapter 7, Leatrice is at the hotel terrace contemplating the sea and recollecting events from her past. Firstly, she recalls a performance of *Timon of Athens* in Moscow for which she designed the stage and also played the main role. Leatrice's second memory brings us to her first rendezvous with Halbert in a nightclub called *Woodcut*. The memory is followed by a long eulogy on the joys of love.

When chapter 8 begins, we are still within Leatrice's memory. When Halbert finally shows up, the narrative suddenly shifts to another level and the events in *Woodcut* turn out to be a scene directed by a man (God?) endowed with superhuman power. Then, another director appears and they begin to show each other their surrealistic visions. One of the visions presents a woman planning an abortion and the spirit of the unborn child asking her for life. At some point, the vision is interrupted to give way to Touqué's ruminations. Finally, when the doctor is ready to carry out the abortion, a figure of death

appears with a flock of ravens and takes everyone with him. The final pages of chapter 8 describe a fashionable Parisian woman; the description has no narrative connection with the preceding story.

Chapter 9 opens part 2 of *Prae*. Like chapter 1, it has an introductory character. The chapter consists of theoretical reflections on the possibility of presenting Leatrice in *Prae*; it also includes lengthy passages describing women's clothes: a shoe, a stocking, and a shoulder-strap. The chapter ends with the pessimistic conclusion that every attempt of picturing Leatrice is doomed to fail.

Although at the beginning of chapter 10 we find Leatrice on the terrace looking at the sea, the second part of *Prae* seems to be an alternative story rather than a continuation of the earlier chapters. Leatrice lives in a nightclub (*Perspective?*), but Touqué and Halbert now appear only in her memories, whereas Ena and Anny are never mentioned. While looking at the sea, Leatrice reminisces about the key moments of her life. In a series of non-chronological flashbacks, she recalls her reflection in a mirror when bidding good-bye to a lover; combing her hair in front of a mirror; her first morphine injection followed by a bath; grey light seen through a skylight; a winter afternoon with her sisters Mária and Márta, waiting for her uncle Péter with her eyes fixed on a clock. The memories are interrupted by the *Fourth Non-Prae-diagonal*, the diary of an Italian princess who is planning to leave her husband and escape with her lover.

Chapter 11 opens with Leatrice watching the sea. Once again a series of childhood memories follows; however, they now concern emotions rather than particular events. The chapter is crowned by the *Fifth Non-Prae-diagonal*, the diary of a children's tutor who, despite being a famous scientist, is more interested in intuitive cognition. Gradually, the diary turns out to be a passionate love letter that contains some of the most beautiful passages in *Prae*.

Chapter 12 recounts the story of Leatrice's uncle, Péter. Throughout the chapter we learn about his unsuccessful love life: while despising women for being "sinful," he continued fantasizing about them, which eventually led to his self-destruction. The chapter ends with the last diagonal, titled the *Sixth Non-Prae-diagonal*, a grotesque story about a fisherman's daughter and a Chinese princess.

Chapter 13 describes Leatrice's meeting with an actress, Zvinskaya, a beautiful woman and fascinating person who strongly influenced Leatrice's life. The chapter

includes Leatrice's contemplations on philosophical themes and descriptions of Zvinskaya, followed by an analysis of Leatrice's rebellion against Péter's lifestyle. At one point, Leatrice's memories abruptly end and give way to Touqué's ruminations. At the end of the chapter we see Touqué sitting in an armchair and listening to a discussion between three women: Tilia Parvifolia, Potentilla, and Ajuga; it is unclear whether the scene is an element of the story or only Touqué's vision.

Chapter 14, which is at the same time part 3 of the novel, consists of meditations (or a diary, in the first edition) of Halbert's father, a sexagenarian parson in Exeter. On a foggy winter's evening he is sitting in an armchair watching the Exeter cathedral through his window. As the bell in the cathedral strikes seven, he begins to tell the story of his life. Even though the chapter is difficult to summarize due to its fragmented and intricate structure, it is possible to distinguish two main parts. In the first part, Halbert's father recalls how the relationship with his wife began. He also talks extensively about his morphinic visions and regrets being unable to translate them into language. Finally, he recalls the women whom he loved and he reflects on the nature of love and beauty. In the second part, the parson describes two episodes of his life. First, he recollects kissing a girl in Switzerland. The memory is followed by a long analysis of her green dress. Next, he recalls meeting a mentally handicapped girl on a meadow between Cambridge and Ely, and making love with her under a tree. The memories are interspersed with meditations upon Christian love and the nature of virtue and sin. The chapter, and by extension the whole novel, ends abruptly and without a conclusion.



Folio from the manuscript of *PRAE*

Main Theme

As in all of Szentkuthy's novels, the plot in *Prae* is only a pretext for philosophical reflections that — disguised either in narratorial comments, or in the characters' monologues — cover a range of themes from love and erotica to fashion, design, and quantum physics. Szentkuthy often emphasized the encyclopedic character of his works by calling them “catalogues,” but in reality his interest was less in producing an

encyclopedic *survey* than in discovering *affinities* and *analogies* between various phenomena of European culture of the 1920s and 30s.⁶

Szentkuthy owes the idea of the underlying unity of the universe to Paracelsus, a Renaissance physician, philosopher of nature, and alchemist, who in his theoretical writings sought out the correspondences between astronomy, chemistry, and medicine. Paracelsus' philosophy, as Szentkuthy puts it, "expresses the idea that an organ of mine, or a chemical substance and the most distant nebulae are related,"⁷ but whereas Paracelsus was looking for the common denominator of the stars, metals, herbs, and human bodies, the aim of *Prae* was to "incorporate the problems of modern philosophy and mathematics into modern fashion, love, and all aspects of life."⁸

What is characteristic in Szentkuthy's thinking is that by looking for correspondences between philosophy and fashion, or between mathematics and the female body, he transcends the distinction between the conceptual and the visual. By reading the concepts visually, and analyzing the images conceptually, he strives to discover their common structure. If his reflections are difficult to follow, it is not only because of the rigorousness of his idiom, but also because of the idiosyncrasy of his thinking. Let us take for instance the opposition of "space" and "lines," which is one of Szentkuthy's favorite themes. He devotes many pages of *Prae* to enumerating various images in which the aforementioned pattern can be observed. Let us examine some examples:

In a fragment from *Prae* written in 1932, Szentkuthy describes a woman stuck in a crowded cloakroom after a concert.⁹ The woman is wearing a cream colored dress with a lace *décolletage*; however, what attracts Szentkuthy's attention is not the dress itself but the contrast between the smoothness of the dress and the complexity of the lace. Intrigued by the opposition of smooth surface and complex lines, Szentkuthy goes on to discover a similar pattern in a series of images: a mirror covered by cobwebs; a shining fish surrounded by a coral reef; a modern building in which empty space is contrasted with grid-like patterns; a nocturnal landscape, where the smooth surface of a lake is opposed to a complex structure of leaves in the circumjacent bushes.

⁶ This is why the main poetical devices employed by Szentkuthy are analogy and simile.

⁷ Miklós Szentkuthy, *Frivolitások és hitvallások* (Budapest: Magvető, 1988) 325.

⁸ "Nem tudjuk kicsoda: Megmondjuk kicsoda," unsigned interview with Miklós Szentkuthy in *Az élet faggatottja: Beszélgetések Szentkuthy Miklóssal*, ed. Márton Molnár (Budapest: Hamvas Intézet, 2006) 9.

⁹ Szentkuthy, *Prae*, Vol. 1: 217–221.

The same opposition appears on the first pages of *Prae* (written in 1933), where the main hero, the philosopher Leville-Touqué, sees a hat in a shop window. The hat attracts Touqué's attention because its double construction of "greenish-grey membrane" and "thin nickel tubes" embodies the opposition of space and lines:

[...] for months I had been in love with a girl [...] with whom one sunny morning I was looking at Paris shop windows, the colorful shelves of flower shops, jewelers, and drug stores, when we arrived in front of a milliner's shop. Just one hat was on display behind the window, and even that barely resembled a hat: it was a small hemisphere in shape, one part of which was composed of shining, thin nickel tubes, with the gaps between being left empty, grid-like, the other part consisting of some thin, greenish-grey membrane about which I could not determine whether it was metal, paper, glass, or some textile. The sight of the superb structure of this marvel made my senses reel, but left the girl rather cool.¹⁰

At one point, in the obsessive search for analogies, Szentkuthy turns from images to concepts. Take for example a draft of *Prae* from June 7, 1933, where Szentkuthy applies the opposition of space and lines to distinguish between two types of philosophical thinking.¹¹ The draft contains a table, in which a smooth surface (or empty space) and a "Scottish" grid are given their philosophical equivalents, which are respectively phenomenology and scholasticism. In other words, Szentkuthy associates qualities of smoothness and purity with phenomenological analysis, while an image of a network of lines brings to his mind scholastic thought.

The following table sums up our analysis of Szentkuthy's search for affinities between fashion, architecture, nature, literature, and philosophy. Of course, the table is by no means exhaustive: it is only a fractional part of the complex system of analogies that Szentkuthy presents in *Prae*. Reconstruction of this system remains a task for the future.

¹⁰ Ibid., Vol. 1: 8. Translated by Tim Wilkinson. Hereafter cited as TW.

¹¹ PIM [Archives of the Petöfi Literary Museum in Budapest] V. 5498/1/74, fol. 3. The draft was not incorporated into *Prae*.

	<i>space</i>	<i>lines</i>
fashion (woman's dress)	smooth surface	lace <i>décolletage</i>
everyday objects	mirror	cobwebs
nature	shining fish	coral reef
architecture	empty space	"Scottish" grid
landscape	lake	bushes
fashion (hat)	membrane	nickel tubes
philosophy	phenomeno logy	scholastics

Structure

Given the highly limited plot, the overall structure of *Prae* resembles a mosaic of loosely connected elements: scenes, descriptions, philosophical reflections, analyses, and Touqué's articles. The elements are usually introduced through the characters' memories: the novel's typical narrative pattern involves a series of achronological flashbacks interspersed with narratorial comments.

Szentkuthy theorizes the mosaic composition of *Prae* in a famous passage in chapter 5.¹² In the middle of the chapter Leatrice recalls events from her childhood in Russia. When her memories end, the narrator interferes only to disclose the shift in time as merely apparent: we might think we have just learnt something about Leatrice's past

¹² Szentkuthy, *Prae*, Vol. 1: 340–343.

but in reality the *analepsis* was only an excuse to portray Leatrice in a different milieu. The relation between the past and present, continues the narrator, is not temporal but spatial, and one should think of the individual fragments of the novel as elements of a building that coexist instantaneously. Therefore, the narrator concludes, in a modern novel the term “past” makes no sense anymore:

[...] the old novel, which used the technique of retrospection, became stuck in the boredom of anemic time monism; the experimental novel tries to realize the absurdity of placing various events without temporality, like pure elements of space, using as sophisticated as possible architectural tricks.¹³

If the present and the past are situated linearly one after another, it is due only to technical shortcomings of the novelistic form. Instead of being placed in a book, individual fragments could be printed on separate pieces of paper, which would make them easily interchangeable:

[...] the idea is that every element of a narrative could move freely, no element should have a fixed place, the elements should continuously perform the most radical Brownian molecular dance. [...] In the modern narrative there is no sequentiality of any kind: if a narrative happens to appear in a form of a book, it is only due to constraints and inefficiency, in fact any fragment can occur anywhere, at any time the whole work can be regrouped.¹⁴

The narrator compares the interchangeable fragments to fish swimming about in a “schizophrenic aquarium.” In a 1934 interview, Szentkuthy repeated this simile, this time referring to the three parts of *Prae*:

This book has one great advantage. It consists of three parts, but these parts are not clearly distinguished, moreover one does not follow another. They are like fish swimming about in an aquarium. There is no obstacle to change their order, or to read them in reverse order.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid., Vol. 1: 341.

¹⁴ Ibid., Vol. 1: 343.

¹⁵ “Nem tudjuk micsoda: Megmondjuk kicsoda,” 10.

Scholars have resorted to a variety of metaphors to describe this structure. *Prae* has been called an “architectural work,”¹⁶ a “cathedral,”¹⁷ or a novel that privileges space over time.¹⁸ These metaphors converge with the concept of “spatial form” introduced by Joseph Frank, who argued that some modernist novels can be fully comprehended only when the reader — instead of reading the text as a sequence — grasps the totality of relationships between the textual units in one instant of time.¹⁹ Spatiality may be only a metaphor, yet a convincing one, for it aptly points out the nature of the connections between the units of *Prae*. Let us not forget that when Szentkuthy proposes to abolish narrative links between the units, he does not say that there should be no relation between them. Relation between two units remains, only it is not narrative but thematic. Now, in order to grasp the thematic relation between two units of text — Leatrice in Cannes and Leatrice in Russia — one needs to look at both of them at the same time. Hence, one needs to think of them as if they coexisted spatially.²⁰

What early critics saw as a technical shortcoming contemporary scholars have hailed as a herald of postmodernism. Undoubtedly, we can say without exaggeration that, with his idea of a novel whose parts can be freely reshuffled, Szentkuthy was far in advance of his times and is the originator of narrative fracturings often credited to others. His idea has a clear conceptual parallel in the cut-up technique developed by Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs, or in works such as B.S. Johnson’s *The Unfortunates* and Marc Saporta’s *Composition No. 1*, which are no longer traditional books but boxes containing unbound pages. These are not inventions, and hardly as radical as currently viewed, but essentially variations on a technique already conceived by Szentkuthy in 1934. However,

¹⁶ Imre Bata, “A regény regénye: a Prae,” *Új írás* 20, No. 11 (1980) 3.

¹⁷ Gyula Rugási, *Szent Orpheus arcképe* (Budapest: Pesti Szalon, 1992) 14.

¹⁸ Béla Pomogáts, “Egy eszmélet katalógusa: Jegyzetek Szentkuthy *Orpheus*-ának margójára,” *Magyar Műhely* 12, No. 45–46 (1974) 13–14; Pál Nagy, *Az elérhetetlen szöveg: “Prae”-palimpszeszt* (Budapest: Anonymus, 1999) 123; Gyula Rugási, “Kant és az egér,” *Orpheus* 5, No. 1 (1994) 75–76.

¹⁹ Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

²⁰ It should be also noted that the fragmentary form of *Prae* is not without effect on the process of reading. Many scholars have observed that *Prae* challenges the reader’s habits by demanding reading that would be selective, random, and non-linear: once the position of a fragment is insignificant for its meaning, reading ceases to be linear and becomes combinatory. Cf. Endre Balogh, “Szentkuthy és az olvasás: Az egyetlen metafora felé és Az alázat kalendáriuma,” *Alföld* 50, No. 9 (1999) 65–77; Éva November, “Szentkuthy – az első magyar strukturalista: A *Prae* ürügyén,” *Magyar Műhely* 12, No. 45–46 (1974) 55; József J. Fekete, *POST: Szentkuthy Miklós és művei* (Novi Sad: Forum, 2005) 95. Unfortunately, unlike Cortázar’s *Hopscotch* (1963), *Prae* does not include a “table of instructions” that would guide the reader through the labyrinth of text, nor are the units of the text clearly distinguished. Providing readers of *Prae* with a reading guide will be difficult and it remains a task for the future.

Szentkuthy later renounced his ambitions to revolutionize the novel form by emphasizing that his technique of composition was rooted in a long tradition, thereby putting even his own degree of inventiveness in question. For instance, when he named his cycle of novels *St. Orpheus Breviary*, it was precisely to indicate that the fragmentary nature of his works can be traced back to Catholic prayer books.²¹ Elsewhere, in the afterword to his pseudo-biography of Dürer (*Son of Saturn*), Szentkuthy pointed out similarities between his mosaic-like style and Dürer's series of woodcuts.²² While these parallels or precursors of the fragmentary certainly are germane, within the domain of literature itself, Szentkuthy remains an innovator of such techniques.

Narrative Voices

Let us concentrate now on the innovation that *Prae* introduces on the level of narrative voices. Although Szentkuthy refers to *Prae* as a novel, his book also contains elements of essay and diary in which the author strongly marks his presence, speaking either through the voice of the narrator, or through the reflections of the characters: Leatrice, Touqué, and Halbert's father. Scholars tend to attach special importance to the fact that Szentkuthy's characters are often his own self-portraits.²³ However, by concentrating on the relation between the characters and the author the critics have overlooked the relation between the characters and the narrator, which seems to be of much greater importance. The fact that Szentkuthy liked to filter his ideas both through the narrator and the characters brought him to the discovery of an innovative narrative technique: in the long passages of philosophical reflections *it is impossible to tell whether the quoted thoughts belong to the character or the narrator*.

As Dorrit Cohn shows in *Transparent Minds*, one of the characteristics of modernist novel was an increased interest in depicting inner life of the characters. In effect, the beginning of the twentieth century saw the publication of numerous novels that

²¹ Szentkuthy, *Frivolitások és hitvallások*, 405.

²² Miklós Szentkuthy, *Saturnus fia* (Budapest: Corvina, 1966) 421–427.

²³ See László Németh, "Magyar kaleidoszkóp," in *A mítosz mítosza: In memoriam Szentkuthy Miklós*, ed. Gyula Rugási (Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 2001) 19; Miklós Béládi, "A *Prae*, vagy regény a regényről," in *Válaszutak: tanulmányok* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1983) 219; Tibor Gintli and Gábor Schein, *Az irodalom rövid története* (Pécs: Jelenkor, 2007) 2: 323; Lajos Grendel, *A modern magyar irodalom története: Magyar líra és epika a 20. században* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2010) 320; Péter Bálint, *Szentkuthy álruhában: Közelítések egy gigantikus napló írójához* (Budapest: Széphalom Könyvműhely, 2003) 26–27. See also Tibor Pintér's essay in this issue.

experiment with different forms of rendering the protagonists' unspoken thoughts.²⁴ One of the greatest innovators in this field was Joyce. Cohn gives the following example from *Ulysses*:

[1] His hand took this hat from the peg over his initialed heavy overcoat, and his lost property office secondhand waterproof. [2] Stamps: stickyback pictures. [3] Daresay lots of officers are in the swim too. [4] Course they do. [5] The sweated legend in the crown of his hat told him mutely: Plasto's high grade ha. [6] He peeped quickly inside the leather headband. [7] White slip of paper. [8] Quite safe.²⁵

According to Cohn, Joyce's innovation lies in the fact that Bloom's thoughts (phrases 2–4 and 7–8) are introduced within the narrator's voice (phrases 1 and 5–6) with no clear signs of quotation (which would traditionally be *inquit* phrase or graphical signal).²⁶ The consequence of this technique — and the further innovation — is that in the transitory passages between the narrator's comment and character's monologue, their voices fuse and become indistinguishable. For instance, in the following example it is impossible to tell whether it is the narrator or Bloom that calls the corpse “dead weight.”

The mutes shouldered the coffin and bore it in through the gates. So much dead weight. Felt heavier myself stepping out of that bath. First the stiff: then the friends of the stiff. Corny Kelleher and the boy followed with their wreaths. Who is that beside them? Ah, the brother-in-law.²⁷

As Cohn shows, similar fusion of voices can be found in many post-Joycean novels, for example, Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) or Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Obviously Cohn could not have known that similar narrative patterns can be found also in Szentkuthy's *Prae* (1934). Moreover, while in the works of Joyce, Döblin, and Woolf fusion of voices is usually limited to one or several transitory phrases, Szentkuthy goes much farther by including entire monologues in which the narrator's and the character's voices are indistinguishable.

²⁴ Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983) 3–9.

²⁵ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1942) 56.

²⁶ Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 62–76, 283. This technique was popularized by Joyce but it was probably Dorothy Richardson who first employed it. See for example, Dorothy Richardson, *Pointed Roofs*, in *Pilgrimage* (London: Virago, 1979) 1:31. I am grateful to Professor Suzanne Keen for pointing this out.

²⁷ Joyce, *Ulysses*, 100.

Let us first look at an example where Szentkuthy employs a technique similar to that from *Ulysses*. In the following passage quoted monologue is introduced without signs of quotation,²⁸ while in the transitional phrases the narrator's and Leatrice's voices mesh. The passage is from chapter 10, where Leatrice first recollects the feeling of losing body consciousness when taking a bath; next she goes on to reflect on a difference between natural human cleanliness and the representation of cleanliness in modern design. The passage consists of twelve sentences. I provided each sentence with a number. Here is the passage:

[1] She was immersed in the bath up to her neck but there was no connection between her head floating over the surface of the water and her body sliding under it — she felt that her legs were seaweeds that would soon spread out in the soapy foam like a bundle of strings dropped into water — she kept in her memory the “portrait” of her legs but those sticks under the yellow water, which looked like lost remnants of a shipwreck, did not resemble it. [2] If the bath inevitably transforms a human being into a jellyfish, why did the *senatus populusque* erect statues in the *thermae*? [3] My nude? — [4] she asked and smiled when she hit her knee against the wall of the enamel sarcophagus, like a lonely cork lifebelt cast by the tide, whose subject had been washed away. [5] Perhaps there is a profound difference between the mechanical preparation of bodily cleanliness and a human being who is (also bodily) clean. [6] How different is this English Halbert after a bath than me. [7] It is not simply the fact that I spread powder over my body and by this I retroactively falsify the purification by making it decorative, while he settles for a coarse scrubbing brush. [8] There was no sewerage in the village where he was born, and still everything was dazzlingly clean: the stone houses always seemed to be washed by a shining rain, the streets, the stone stairs full of holes, the roofs, the roof tiles, the iron ornaments of the wells, everything. [9] Halbert's face, too, was such a scrubbed village. [10] My bathroom is full of pale blue ceramic tiles — the majolica is not anymore the real cleanliness, it is not empirical but speculative cleanliness: the light, the reflections of the colors, the slipperiness, they all convert hygiene into a sort of ironic poetry of Hygieia, which is not yet entirely fake decoration, but no longer original realization of cleanliness. [11] She designed her bathroom herself last week and when Halbert saw it, he sneered impolitely: it resembled two catacomb openings, one over the other, both in the same shape — the lower coffin-tube was the bathtub, while the upper cylinder was a huge lamp box with a

²⁸ This feature has been first observed in: Nagy, *Az elérhetetlen szöveg*, 134. Apart from this brief mention, Szentkuthy's narrative techniques have not been studied.

blurred glass, behind which a row of gigantic apricot-shaped light bulbs was shining, like preserves in a Fourierist fruit jar. ^[12] Halbert mumbled something about “motives of cleanliness ... transcendental ... german ...”²⁹ and now she admitted that it was Halbert that was right, Halbert who even now washes himself using a bowl and a jug for he dislikes “musical ideograms of cleanliness” (as he used to call modern bathrooms) — and instead of them he prefers water.³⁰

The passage starts with psycho-narration [1]. The quotation of Leatrice’s question [3], though not graphically signaled, is followed by a dash and an *inquit* formula [4], but the quotation of Leatrice’s first-person monologue [6–10] lacks any graphical or narratorial signal. Likewise, the narrator’s subsequent comment [11] is introduced without any sign of change of voices. The status of the transitional sentences [2] and [5] is ambivalent: they might be instances equally of quoted monologue, narrated monologue, or narratorial comment. We must then conclude that in these phrases the narrator’s and Leatrice’s voices are indistinguishable.

In the above-quoted passage fusion of voices is thus limited only to two sentences. As for the other phrases, we could easily identify the “I” [6] as Leatrice, since she is explicitly referring to her bathroom [10], which is later [11] described by the narrator. Likewise, in all metafictional passages, the “I” is certainly that of the narrator. For instance, in chapter 9 the narrator explicitly marks his presence when he reflects on the possibilities of describing Leatrice. But the narrator presents himself not only as the author of *Prae*, but also as a philosopher preoccupied with problems similar to those of Leville-Touqué or Leatrice. In consequence, when first-person narration occurs without quotational signal in the middle of a character’s monologue, a problem arises: are we dealing with a character’s monologue, or narratorial comment? Our question might be solved, provided that there were a stylistic or ideological difference between the characters’ and the narrator’s languages. Yet their reflections are cast in a uniform idiom for which Dávid Szolláth has recently coined a name “Szentkuthyan.”³¹ Moreover, not only are their idioms identical, they also share the same ideas. (For instance, the thesis about the

²⁹ In the Hungarian original Halbert’s words are in English. “German” is set in lower case.

³⁰ Szentkuthy, *Prae*, 2: 99–100.

³¹ In his article Szolláth points out that one of the drawbacks of Szentkuthy’s translation of *Ulysses* is lack of stylistic variety. Dávid Szolláth, “Leletmentés: Válogatott szentkuthyzmusok az *Ulysses* szövegében,” *Alföld* 9 (2010) 64–73.

distinction of “theme” and “development” from Touqué’s first article is repeated in chapter 9 by the narrator.)³²

Thus, in most of the cases, the monologues lack any kind of indication that could allow us to determine whose thoughts we are presently reading. Let us see an example that illustrates this indeterminacy. The example is perhaps not typical since instead of quoting Touqué’s thoughts the narrator discusses his article. Nevertheless, the narrative pattern that interests us remains the same. The passage is from the first chapter of *Prae*, which summarizes four articles written by Leville-Touqué for his journal *Antipsyché*. In the first article, Touqué tries to identify raw elements from which he would subsequently compose a novel. He chooses three of them: an image of a sunflower, the plan of a story, the description of a ship. He ends his article with an idea for combining them together. What will be the result? The answer can be found in the second article from *Antipsyché*, which begins with the following passage:

[1] What will happen next? [2] Leville-Touqué discussed this subject in the second article from *Antipsyché* entitled *Towards a New Culture of Play on Words, or About the Rules of Dogmatic Accidentalism*. [3] Taking architecture as his starting point, he began by observing the following trick: the architect draws a square, then he draws another one in a way that the latter square partially covers the former one so that a common surface arises: this surface will be the central and the essential form of the construction; once two squares appear on the ground plan, an autonomous staircase will rise above their common surface; although one can feel that it is not an autonomous form but a by-product, a shadow, or a relational reflection of two accidentally superimposed alien forms, it is precisely the staircase that will be one of the most important parts of the building. [4] If instead of the ground plan, our two squares appear, for instance, on the plan of a façade, the result will be a double grille of balcony bars, just like when two regions intersect on a map the statistic network of colored lines will be doubly dense.

[5] This method can have numerous varieties, but each time the idea remains the same: there are several superimposed forms that produce common surfaces, double or triple “accidental” areas, which are the essential pillars of the whole construction. [6] Let us imagine a tree whose leaves do not grow as the biology textbooks prescribe it but each branch presents formations born from two, three, or more superimposed leaves in

³² Szentkuthy, *Prae*, 1:15–16; 2:53.

a way that only the common surfaces exists: nothing remains in the place of the single leaves. ^[7] We could compare such a tree to the aforementioned architectural style. ^[8] But this style is nothing more than an architectural cult of play on words.

^[9] Let us take a play on words, for instance, a nickname given to a female writer by her friend: *Hippopochondra Stylopotama*, a scientific name of hippopotamus with which he refers to the woman's widely known hypochondria and her penchant for writing. ^[10] What happens in this play on words is quite similar to the case in which two figures "accidentally" fall one upon the other: one square corresponds to "hippopotamus," the other one — to "hypochondriac"; now, like an engineer, I push one towards the other so that a double surface arises: there will be a linguistic stain with hippopotamus-life and hypochondriac-life superimposed, while on the left and on the right two simple surfaces will remain occupied by the concepts of hippopotamus and hypochondriac.³³

The passage starts with the narrator's recapitulating the main thesis of Touqué's article: the essence of a building is the common space of two geometrical figures [1–5]. Then comes the first example: a tree whose only visible parts would be the superimposed leaves [6–8]. Then, in the second example (*Hippopochondra Stylopotama*), the first person appears [10]. Is it an unsigned quotation from Touqué's article, or is the narrator supplementing Touqué's theses with his own example? Which one of them comes up with the idea of *Hippopochondra Stylopotama*? The question is insoluble since both interpretations seem equally valid. In effect, in the following four pages long monologue (which I do not quote here) the narrator's and Touqué's voices are perfectly fused. Moreover, if we go back to the previous example [6–8], it will become apparent that what we also do not know is whether the example of the tree is included in Touqué's article or is a comment added by the narrator. This point is crucial: indeterminacy is also a concern of the philosophical passages without an explicit "I." As a consequence, whenever psycho-narration turns into philosophical reflection couched in gnomic present tense, the reader caught in the middle of a long monologue is unable to tell whose train of thoughts he is reading.

Szentkuthy's narrative innovations are a significant contribution to Modernist literature. Unfortunately — as we have seen on the example of Cohn's *Transparent Minds* — both typological and historical studies of narrative forms usually restrict themselves to

³³ Szentkuthy, *Prae*, 1:27–28.

examples from English, French, German, and sometimes Russian literature. Szentkuthy's *Prae*, although daringly innovative, remains unknown. We can only hope that with the upcoming translation of *Prae* into English, Szentkuthy's novel will get its due place in the history of literary Modernism.

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On the future of aesthetics

Miklós Szentkuthy: *Prae*¹



Miklós Szentkuthy, 1934 (Photo: Veres)

Antal Szerb

¹ Antal Szerb (1901–1945) was a Hungarian writer (author of *Journey by Moonlight*) and Szentkuthy's friend. When *Prae* appeared in 1934, Szerb was one of few readers who hailed the novel as a masterpiece of modern literature. Szerb's review was originally published in the journal *Erdélyi Helikon* 7, No. 7 (1934) 547–49. It was reprinted in *A mítosz mítosza: In memoriam Szentkuthy Miklós*, ed. Gyula Rugási (Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 2001) 20–23. Translation by Tim Wilkinson. [F. S.]

The publication of *Prae* is unquestionably an event in Hungarian literature. There is no novel so successful or popular about which as much is spoken in literary discussions as *Prae*. True, most people are only mouthing their prejudgments, hiding their alarm under the tried and tested Budapest tricks of superiority. As far as reading it, few have done so, and those who have done so did not read it right through. That does not detract from its value, however; after all, the last person to read the *Critique of Pure Reason* was Kant when he went through the proofs.

But whatever approach I take to the book (the stock phrase “take the book in my hands” is inapplicable since its external form and its size are reminiscent of a square slab of marble under a Doric column, making its being picked up totally illusory), my first instinct is, at all events, one of bewilderment. That bewilderment does not lift later on either: to the end a curious stranger is sprawled on my desk. In the book, subtle epistemological speculations rub shoulders with impressionistic descriptions of bathing costumes. But then by the time one gives way to the frivolous tone of bathing costumes it turns out that in fact it is dealing with some modern building all made of glass, except for the windows. Extraordinarily slim and gorgeous redheads parade by only for the author to locate on their body the sites of the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon and several Lateran councils. References do occur, but strictly to non-existing books. And yet, I do not doubt for a moment that I am reading a very significant and, indeed, wise work, and the fact that I am bewildered is my fault. Through literary good breeding, I still lack the chapter on “the proper behavior towards giants.”

In any event, one or two key features can be clarified. The question that comes up most often, for instance: “What does it mean — *Prae*?” and, in that connection, what is Szentkuthy’s prime objective.

It was a foundational tenet of the intellectual history movement that there is something common to every manifestation of a given historical era, and the historical sciences need to be focused on that common factor. On that *prae-conchoid*, which in the 18th century is present equally in the façades of buildings, in the fates of cardsharps, the smiles of empresses, and the statistical data of standard textbooks on economics. Szentkuthy is seeking the *prae-whatever* of our own times. That as yet *prae-cultural* element of form that *prae-determines* every cultural phenomenon. That is why architecture slips across so easily into fugues on bathing-costumes and epistemology, as the “*prae-building*” and “*prae-bathing-costume*” are somehow one and the same as the “and” and “absolute and-ness” of the *prae-relationship*.

It stands to reason that this magnificent and unique objective cannot be accomplished with the means available to discursive prose. By the nature of his goal,

and besides that through his own creative temperament, Szentkuthy had to experiment with a thousand innovations: the book is experimental in character from start to finish. Hence the bewilderment (as if one were strolling about in an enormous blueprint-turned-space), and hence too, among other things, the name *Prae*. Its main devices: pinpoint intellectual analysis, a maniacal and splendid objectivity, *Sachlichkeit*, in the world of concepts, and metaphors, first and foremost, in the world of expression.

Even if one were to reject completely Miklós Szentkuthy's intentions and his way of accomplishing it, one would still have to accord his similes an eminent place in Hungarian literature. Similes as audacious, startling, and apposite, and in such quantity, are not to be found anywhere else. Daring. If one were to make a quantitative measure of the value of the similes individually, that is, measure the distance that exists in the ordinary consciousness between two concepts that are linked by just a single one of Szentkuthy's metaphors, then he would undoubtedly hold the world record. Poets of old, such as Hölderlin in his late period, were able to bridge similarly remote things, but then Hölderlin had it easy, being mad by then, whereas Szentkuthy does the same thing when he is stone cold sober.

His other undoubted great merit is his unconditional intelligence. And I must stress the unconditional bit, because there may be other Hungarian writers not a wit less intelligent than Szentkuthy, but no one else dares to invest his intelligence so openly in his writings. Dull-witted writers are often cleverer while they are writing than they are "in real life": literary forms often provide a perspective behind the commonplaces. But a clever writer always disconnects the brain a bit when he sits down to write, and there is more than one reason for doing so. One reason may be anti-intellectual snobbery: ever since the Romantic age we have learnt that a writer does not write with his brains but with his whole spirit, and above all with that obscure thing called inspiration. An excessively clever writer is always suspicious. The English critical world, to the present day, hems and haws in its reception of Aldous Huxley, its cleverest writer. But even if someone manages to get over that hurdle, he will find himself up against the convention which, by its insistence on the status quo, stops a writer from being much cleverer than those who have written before him. But if someone has the ability to demolish ready-made forms and create new ones, then there is still the readership to face. A clever writer is usually clever enough not to assume that his readers are as clever as he is.

Szentkuthy supremely cannot be bothered with all this. He lightly sets convention aside and accepts the oddities of the unconventional, the *prae-*

conventional. As far as the public goes — that does not so much as feature in the intellectual hermit's consciousness, not even as a temptation.

A hermit is a negative being, his whole life a protest against worldly pleasures. An intellectual hermit is also, first and foremost, negative: a protest against the already formulated stupidities of intellectual life. And, even more, against its wisdoms: commonplace truths, merely by virtue of having been already formulated, are, viewed from the elevated heights of the intellectual hermit, seen as platitudes. If Szentkuthy wanted to use a Latin prefix at all costs, he might just as well have chosen as his title "Anti." *Antipsyché* is the title of the journal that one of the characters in the book is writing to counter the psychologism of our age. There is also much about antihumanism, and even more about antilove. About once in every three pages, on average, he proves that love is not love but something quite different — first a syllogism, then a matter of will, then a third time, something different again. In the end, indeed, one closes the book on the thought that love, in point of fact, is not love but something else that, for simplicity's sake, perhaps would be best to call love.

There has not yet been a Hungarian book as intelligent as *Prae*. It skips lightly, playfully, ironically and in incomparably individual fashion around the highest intellectual peaks of the European mind. It will become one of the great documents of Hungarian culture that this book was written in Hungarian. But one cannot get rid of that question of art ethics, as it were: Is it right to allow a writer to be as clever as Miklós Szentkuthy? Indeed, if someone writes that intelligently, is what he produces a literary creation, or does it maybe relate to literature in the way that invisible ultraviolet rays do to the visible spectrum? Never before did I feel as I did while reading *Prae* that artistic form is not primarily an aesthetic so much as a social factor. A social contract over form so that the artist should be able to communicate with the public. A writer who rejects conventional form so drastically is, by that very fact, also rejecting the readers, or at least such a large majority of them that those who are left can hardly be called a public. But does not the public also belong to the totality of a creation? Let us leave that question open, however. That is the stylish way if one is going to write an opinion about *Prae*.

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On the future of aesthetics

Miklós Szentkuthy, *Prae* : Table¹



Translated by Gyula Sipos

¹ When *Prae* appeared (3 May 1934), nearly all of its readers criticised the book for its obscurity. An unreasonably small number of paragraphs combined with the complexity of the text was indeed a factor that made *Prae* difficult to read, no matter how erudite the reader was. Szentkuthy did not care about the critics' voices but he did listen attentively to the critical remarks of his wife. It is at her request that he completed *Prae* with a table of contents, which appeared 2 June 1934 as a separate booklet [Miklós Szentkuthy, *Tartalommutató Szentkuthy Miklós PRAE c. művéhez* (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1934)]. In 1977, Gyula Sipos translated the table of contents into French and published it in the journal *Le nouveau commerce*, no. 38 (Automne 1977): 133–159. In 1980, *Prae* appeared in a revised edition with the table of contents integrated into the text [Miklós Szentkuthy, *Prae*, 2nd ed. (Budapest: Magvető, 1980)]. Reading of the table of contents gives a foretaste of the novel's complexity. (F. S.)

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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Miklós Szentkuthy, *Prae* (Chapter 1)¹

Translated by Philippe Dôme, Pál Nagy, and Tibor Papp



Draft to *Prae*

¹ Szentkuthy wrote most of the text of *Prae* in the years 1928–33. In the summer of 1933, he began correcting the manuscript. It is at that time that he wrote the prefatory pages in which he put his reflections on novel writing. *Prae* appeared in 1934 [Miklós Szentkuthy, *Prae* (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1934)]. In 1974, the French writer Philippe Dôme together with two Hungarian writers, Pál Nagy and Tibor Papp, translated the first pages of *Prae* into French and published them in the journal *D'Atelier*, No. 6–7 (1974) 7–58. In 1980, *Prae* appeared in a revised edition. The text was divided into chapters and the prefatory pages became chapter 1 [Miklós Szentkuthy, *Prae*, 2nd ed. (Budapest: Magvető, 1980)]. In 2004, the third edition of *Prae* appeared with no further changes [Miklós Szentkuthy, *Prae*, 3rd ed. (Budapest: Magvető, 2004)]. (F. S.)

Dans sa revue *Antipsyché*, Leville-Touqué a écrit un article intitulé *Schème du Commencement ou composition nouvelle*. Dans cet article, il prend un romancier imaginaire — ou un philosophe qui ne s'imposait ce rôle d'écrivain-cobaye que pour ramasser des arguments sur d'autres terrains pour sa nouvelle logique — et assigne à cet individu d'observer le point sur lequel l'inspiration commence à germer, mais avant lequel il n'avait encore, lui, aucune inspiration logique ou artistique pour fabriquer un roman ou constituer un système : et à l'aide de ce germe premier et de ses prolongements immédiats, il s'efforce d'examiner cette nouvelle mode de composition (relations spéciales analyse/unité, hasard et loi). Après le *Schème du Commencement*, dans un deuxième article, il résumait systématiquement ses assertions : *Vers la civilisation nouvelle du jeu de mots, ou des règles de l'accidentalisme dogmatique*. Le contenu du premier article : depuis des mois, j'étais amoureux d'une jeune fille (c'était en effet écrit à la première personne) avec laquelle, par une matinée ensoleillée, je regardais les vitrines parisiennes, les gais étalages des fleuristes, des bijouteries et des drogueries, quand nous atteignons une boutique dans la devanture de laquelle on ne voyait qu'un seul chapeau, encore ressemblait-il à peine à un chapeau : petite demi-sphère dont une partie est formée de minces tubes en nickel chromé, espacés comme un grillage, et l'autre d'une sorte de mince pelure d'un gris vert, dont je ne pouvais distinguer s'il s'agissait d'un matériau métallique, de papier, de verre ou de textile. J'étais étourdi d'enchantement à la vue de cette merveilleuse construction, tandis que la fille en restait plutôt froide. Je pense qu'on ne peut pas construire de symbole plus grandiose du printemps que ce chapeau mi-logique mi-radiotechnique. J'ai toujours goûté dans le printemps une constante à l'armature naïve et une ordonnance bavarde d'inspiration rationnelle (excellamment représentées par les tubes de nickel rangés en

quartiers) — et en même temps, une clarté paradoxale, une pénombre scintillante, la certitude maladroite des instincts et leur incertitude consciente (ceci symbolisé donc par l'autre partie du chapeau, renflée, plissée en je ne sais quelle matière). Il est sans doute frappant que mon cerveau pratique la symbolisation selon un mécanisme aussi cru, mais je voulais dès maintenant — avec la roideur du didactisme — suggérer la saveur de mes obsessions : étroite et instinctive interdépendance, désir d'interdépendance, technique affamée d'interdépendanciation à des choses hasardément diverses, comme ces tubes de nickel et ce sachet de verre ici dans la vitrine — des sentiments les plus universels, donc les plus obscurs (ainsi ce sentiment complexe que nous avons du printemps et que l'on pourrait considérer comme sa définition infiniment privée). Que voulait dire ce chapeau ? On a toujours considéré la rigidité étincelante des tubes, tels des côtes qui encagent le globe d'une petite tête de femme encore inexistante pour lui — comme l'incarnation de la règle, des divisions, de la vue en plan, du système, de la différenciation logique : les tubes sont les laquais-symboles éternels de l'ordre. Quand ces éteules métalliques, ces sarments de nickel épousent un crâne brun ou blond, alors ils vont tendre au-dessus de lui des tropiques du Cancer et du Capricorne sévères, des fils de Greenwich et des équateurs pédants : le cerveau et les bouclettes seront prisonniers des doigt-scorpions de la règle. Mais la règle représentée par les tubes ci-dessus ne signifie quand même pas tout à fait une règle-cage à l'ancienne mode, c'est en partie dans le degré de leur courbure qu'il y a une inclination grotesque, et en partie dans leur éclat un éblouissement cynique, outré, un étincellement blanc aveugle : l'ordre originel, le schéma puritain que représentent toujours de tels sarments uniformes et rigides, dévient pour une part vers le burlesque, l'humour et le jeu, pour l'autre vers le luxe et l'élégance gratuite, vers le monde de la pose ascétique. Cette double déviation ne va pas à l'encontre de l'ordre, mais au contraire l'enrichit : c'est

là que j'ai commencé à entrevoir, avec le flair des explorateurs naïvement avertis, les possibilités nouvelles de la composition et du style rédactionnel : une légère déformation humoristique d'un côté, un semblant de décor frivole de l'autre, exprimeront bien plus énergiquement l'ordre logique ou artistique éternellement désiré, indispensable — que les fils de fer parallèles de l'ordre-cage ancien. J'exprime avec plus de précision la beauté d'un beau lys à l'aide de deux imprécisions artificielles, à l'aide d'un cactus grotesque lui ressemblant un peu (c'est le jeu) et d'une capricieuse garniture de chapeau en tissu brillant manufacturé (c'est le côté mondain) : caricature et garniture pratique constitueraient ensemble l'ordre artistique et aléthologique. Mais j'apprends autre chose encore ici dans la rue, devant cette vitrine. En ce temps-là, j'avais déjà lu bon nombre de livres dans lesquels la philosophie, avec une certaine solennité, érigeait en loi sa propre hypocondrie : le concept du concept, les fondements des fondements, les virtualités des virtualités, l'infra-principe précédant la condition première, qui conditionne toutes les conditions, la signification des conjonctions (« reine-Undheit », absolutes So-tum), les données d'entendement les plus élémentaires — en somme, ces livres puritano-exaltés avaient analysé toute la prélogique hyperlogique. Car ils étaient incontestablement puritains : ils cherchaient au-delà des notions de régularité conventionnelle, de rationalité, de méthodicité, de logicité, une régularité et une méthodicité encore plus primaires : un ordre si élémentaire qu'il s'apparente à peine à notre notion acquise de l'ordre. C'était donc la faillite ou le triomphe du puritanisme (le triomphe de sa faillite peut-être ?), où l'ordre absolu se constitue de fils obscurs, de cellules retorses et d'excipient modern style. Après avoir lu des phénoménologies, des systématologies allemandes, j'ai l'impression que ces « infra »-logiques, ordres et point d'origo absurdes précédant l'ordre — sont complètement dépourvus de certains des traits « compositionnels » et géométriques de la

notion d'ordre et qu'ils sont plutôt une galerie hypothétique de cadres opalescents, d'esquisses vacillantes et de portraits prothéens. C'est là qu'aboutissait la recherche bigote de l'ordre, le puritanisme vraiment puritain. Réapparaît ici ma lourdeur pédagogique, pour symboliser cette notion d'ordre par la deuxième composante du chapeau observé dans la vitrine, en cette matière bizarre, incertaine, dont je ne pouvais discerner si c'était du verre ou de l'étoffe. Devant cette vitrine, j'étais donc en possession de trois notions se rapportant chacune plus ou moins à l'ordre, aux « règles » : le burlesque, la mondanité, et l'infra-logique.

Je demande à la jeune fille jusque-là plutôt indifférente si elle aimerait un chapeau pareil. Elle me répond sèchement qu'elle n'y trouverait aucun plaisir, parce qu'elle n'aurait pas l'impression de porter un chapeau mais — selon mes propres termes — un appareil de radio ou un masque de carnaval artériel « en chromé », mais que de toute façon elle n'aime pas dépenser son argent pour des âneries pareilles. Quand elle a appelé ânerie ce fétiche du printemps dont j'avais commencé à extraire les règles boilésiennes du nouveau style du roman, j'ai eu l'impression qu'elle me tirait une balle de revolver dans la tête. En un moment, j'ai parcouru des yeux sa tenue comme un huissier sanguinaire épelucherait les rubriques d'un inventaire douteux : aux pieds, des trotteurs pour pieds plats ; des bas de coton brun épais ; un costume anglais gris à deux boutons, ceinture à boucle grise ; sur la tête, un chapeau de feutre gris à bords étroits, avec un simple ruban de feutre. D'un seul coup, mon amour a perdu toute raison d'être : parmi les soi-disant vêtements discrets, je n'ai rien à chercher. Par surcroît, je savais que la jeune fille avait beaucoup d'argent, elle ne manquait que de goût. Rapidement et peu amicalement, je prenais congé d'elle, en colère et désespéré, tout échauffé par le dégoût qu'elle m'inspirait. Jusqu'ici, il y a deux motifs

importants dans mon histoire : une théorie amorcée, suivie d'une terrible colère, de haine et de désespoir. Pour mon imagination, c'est l'état idéal : le départ d'une théorie artificielle s'accouplant à une haine violente.

Soudain ces deux facteurs — esquisse de théorie et magma de sentiments — se sont unis en une curieuse résultante, c'est-à-dire en un lambeau d'image inattendue, singulière, apparemment tout à fait insensée, ou plus exactement en une métaphore agrandie. J'ai vu deux ou trois tournesols géants avec leurs coussins de graines noires et leurs courts pétales jaunes qui, frippés, presque fumants, étaient suspendus au-dessus d'un petit lac bleu clair, comme les longues plumes et les couronnes sur les tableaux héraldiques, au-dessus et autour de l'écusson. Certes, dans l'immédiat, je ne voyais aucune nécessité à cette image, mais je la sentais avoir délogé ma tentative de théorisation comme la plénitude de mes émotions, les avoir étouffées, les avoir débranchées du présent. C'était agréable et désagréable à la fois : je me délectais de ce cadeau engourdissant en image de tournesol, de ce baume inattendu, mais les exercices de volonté et de pensée cohérente qui sont partie intégrante de moi-même me manquaient douloureusement. Je venais de me sentir à chaque pas la dureté d'un fauve qui marche à sa proie, et maintenant ils allaient vides comme les schrapnels qui décorent les appartements d'anciens soldats. Mais cette métaphore intruse ne cessait de flotter au-dessus de ma tête avec une ténacité aguichante. Ce compagnon envahissant et sans nom, je l'appelle métaphore plutôt qu'image, parce que je le sentais en rapport à autre chose, comme partie de quelque chose, peut-être plus, peut-être moins qu'un symbole. J'ai déjà dit que j'aime rechercher les rapports organiques entre l'universel et l'absolument accidentel ; je pensais être dans ce cas : mes essais théoriques et ma misogynie primitive n'avaient aucun lien avec ce tournesol nature-morte, qui cependant s'imposait à ma conscience avec tant de force soudaine que j'en soupçonnais

un entre les deux. En examinant de plus près cette image tournesol-cadeau importune, je me suis rendu compte qu'elle n'avait rien d'une image : bien que l'ensemble ait été composé d'éléments figuratifs, c'était un symptôme typiquement métaphorique n'accentuant que quelques contrastes, quelques traits — le coussin de graines noires vu de près, détail d'un détail, presque un seul accent noir ; les pétales, petits flottements, petits moteurs jaunes tremblotants imperceptibles tout autour. Cela produisait la même impression que quand on se colle l'œil à une fleur : on ne voit que des détails agrandis d'une part, et de l'autre on voit mal et flou. Dans le corps collecteur de la fleur, la vision microscopique correspondrait à l'amorce de théorie et le flou à la diffusion des émotions ? Je sentais dans cette image inattendue une certaine logique, mais je la soupçonnais de ne pas être aussi vulgaire qu'on pourrait le croire au premier abord. Et puisque je ne peux pas me contenter de cette offre de tournesols, je reviens à mon état antérieur : à la théorie sur la composition et à la haine éprouvée, et j'essaie d'inventer une quelconque histoire qui exprime mon dégoût pour la mise discrète et pour la jeune fille qui l'incarne. Aussi passé-je à un autre état, à la marche suivante dans le *Schème du Commencement*.

J'imagine l'histoire suivante contre la femme avare : jadis un prince espagnol était amoureux d'une fille qui ne l'aimait pas. Ils se séparent et ne se reverront plus. La fille se fait religieuse et acquiert rapidement une réputation de sainteté : ses principales vertus sont l'économie et la miséricorde. Elle néglige les trésors de couvent, les vend petit à petit et supporte patiemment les attaques lancées contre son couvent et contre elle-même. Peu à peu les biens du couvent passent aux mains des marchands juifs vénitiens. La jeune femme qui est déjà en odeur de sainteté descend elle-même de la branche sicilienne convertie au catholicisme d'une famille de marchands vénitiens, mais ses compagnes ne s'en doutent pas. La « sainte » supérieure (car elle est rapidement devenue supérieure),

meurt inopinément, et s'ouvre le procès en canonisation. C'est ici qu'à proprement parler commence toute l'histoire. Parmi les honorables prélats et dignitaires rassemblés pour le procès se trouve l'ancien soupirant, le prince espagnol, devenu lui aussi religieux, et qui se distingue par son adresse dialectique et son rationalisme érotique enflammé, qu'il compte maintenant mettre à profit pour s'opposer et pour s'attaquer à la canonisation. Sachant que s'il s'y oppose, ce n'est pas parce qu'elle avait repoussé ses avances, mais parce qu'il juge son ascèse profondément antichrétienne et même anticatholique : s'appuyant sur des citations posthumes écrites et orales, il cherche à prouver que le modestie de la jeune femme n'était qu'avarice de souche mercantile, son puritanisme paresse inculte, et que sa générosité miséricordieuse cachait en fait toute son indifférence à la vérité ; quant au côté pratique : les biens conventuels dont elle s'interdisait la jouissance tombaient aux mains des marchands juifs qui les utilisaient en femmes et en vins, mais avant tout pour fabriquer des armes, achetées ensuite par le sultan turc, qui préparait une campagne dévastatrice contre l'Europe chrétienne. Suit un long développement sur la différence entre l'abnégation extravagante (c'est-à-dire authentiquement catholique) et le puritanisme du marchand naïf : lequel, loin d'être mépris de la matière, en est plutôt le culte avoué, n'anéantit pas la matière mais l'accumule ; ainsi dans le luxe qui passe en distractions artistiques, voire en débauche, il y a une manipulation de l'argent gagné plus morale encore que la thésaurisation. Il parvient à démontrer que la supérieure impose un style de pauvreté excessive au couvent parce qu'en somme elle ne trouve rien en ce monde qui surpasse la magnificence incarnée à ses yeux par l'argent. Dans son réquisitoire (car c'en était un) le couvent est présenté comme le noir symbole de « l'abnégation matérialiste ». Mais entre-temps il apprend par hasard que la supérieure descendait de la branche sicilienne d'une célèbre famille de marchands vénitiens dont un des membres

avait sauvé sa propre famille de la ruine. Il part pour Venise observer les marchands. Il y rencontre le nouveau pape dont il apprend la sympathie pour les idées luthériennes : ce nouveau pape a découvert une liasse de manuscrits appartenant à feu la supérieure et traitant des dogmes catholiques avec la plus pure orthodoxie possible — c'est la raison précise pour laquelle ce luthérisant veut empêcher à tout prix la canonisation et pour laquelle il n'est pas mécontent de rencontrer l'érudit célèbre qui en est adversaire lui aussi. Evidemment le prince refuse de traiter avec le pape, qui ne s'en prend aux vertus de la supérieure qu'au nom d'un puritanisme aux relents protestants. Le prince déteste autant la sobriété protestante que la sobriété de souche roturière, et comme il ne veut pas être du même bord que le pape, cesse ses accusations contre les vertus de la défunte. Il disparaît à Venise. (Des marchands juifs, des luthériens diplomates, et un apologiste catholique qui a disparu : *ça, c'est pittoresque !*) L'assemblée canonisante siège encore en Sicile quand arrivent deux hôtes des pôles opposés : du nord la pape, et du sud la flotte turque. Le pape n'est autre qu'un luthérien à l'esprit machiavélique qui, par l'étalage sournois de ses talents rhétoriques et littéraires a fini par conquérir le trône papal, du haut duquel il veut maintenant terroriser les catholiques. L'armée turque est conduite par la jeune femme d'origine juive que l'assemblée est précisément sur le point de canoniser. Elle est donc vivante : toute sa carrière monacale a été superficielle (et non hypocrite), c'est sur le premier bateau turc où on l'a induite en tentation qu'elle s'est enfuie. C'est un cadavre étranger au sien qu'on devait enterrer. Les Turcs dispersent le concile, et la jeune femme, comme le prince, disparaît à Venise. Si je considère comme préparatoires mon esquisse théorique et mon aversion pour la jeune fille, et le tournesol-fragment spontané comme première phase dans le *Schème du Commencement*, alors cette histoire élaborée serait le deuxième grand pas dans ma propre transcroissance en roman.

Ce deuxième pas est caractérisé par le tissage conscient des lignes de force de l'action : des dilemmes, des nœuds tragiques tendancieusement tracés, un amas de crises morales condensées d'une manière mécanique — mon aversion pour la jeune fille s'y épuise. Aversion qui vise moins la fille riche « discrètement » vêtue que l'immense couche humaine dans laquelle on prend cette « discrétion » pour noblesse et vertu, quand elle n'est que mesquinerie de marchand, avarice coriace. En faisant détruire l'assemblée des catholiques siciliens par l'armée turque, j'ai le sentiment d'avoir frappé de ma propre main la masse des naïfs qui ont une vision de modestie vertueuse dans les carences de goût de mon amie. Mais j'avais beau concevoir consciemment cette histoire, la conscience ne fonctionnait tout de même pas sur le plan quotidien, le moignon de tournesol s'interposait et modifiait son rythme de bout en bout : le tournesol était l'initial, le catalyseur hygiénique qui rend les choses irréelles, il transposait la conscience sur un plan plus léger, plus incertain. Il me reste cependant l'élaboration de cette histoire. Où commencer ? Le récit tel que je l'ai décrit ne naissait pas dans mon esprit comme partie d'un roman futur, c'était une entité indépendante, achevée, tel le signe-tournesol qui le précède, avec cette différence que l'affaire, je l'ai consciemment forcée. Mais le but de tout ça n'était autre que fondre dans une structure, dans une équation linéaire, mon aversion pour la jeune fille : dès que j'ai eu trouvé l'équation, l'affaire ne m'intéressait plus, il aurait été absurde d'élaborer cette équation d'action. Une formule algébrique correspondant à une loi physique ne peut pas être développée en récit : le trait essentiel de l'histoire qui précède est de ne pas être, par nature, romançable, de ne pas comporter de destination nouvellistique, mais d'être une équation fermée, achevée, fin prête. Histoire et élaboration n'ont pas de partage en moi : j'ai des histoires qui sont toujours restées histoires ; il serait aussi impossible de les « élaborer » que de bâtir ou d'élaborer la grande muraille à partir

d'une bille de mercure ramassée sur elle-même : le croquis n'a aucun rapport avec une élaboration extérieure, tout croquis est auto-suffisant, impossible à poursuivre. L'« histoire » est un genre littéraire particulier, le « roman » en est un autre, et ils n'ont rien en commun : on ne voit aucune parenté, si lointaine soit-elle, entre écrivains-à-romans et écrivains-à-histoires. L'histoire qui ne comporte pas en elle-même de destination nouvellistique représente la composition pure : dans mes « élaborations » (ne s'appuyant évidemment sur aucune « histoire ») apparaissent des « histoires » en tant que projets de composition ; cependant ces compositions n'englobent pas la structure de l'œuvre, de l'œuvre entière, mais constituent des « structures »-chapitres intercalées comme entre-jeux, en d'autres termes : si, après avoir écrit deux scènes (sans « histoire ») il m'en vient à l'esprit une idée de structure, une possibilité de composition, je n'essaierai pas de ramasser les deux scènes déjà écrites en une entité structurelle, mais j'emploierai la « structure » comme scène nouvelle, troisième scène après les deux autres. Ce qu'on appelle composition artistique n'est pas l'ossature du roman, la charpente qui soutient l'ensemble, mais un protagoniste distinct : comme si la trame gestuelle dans Roméo et Juliette y devenait un personnage. Ainsi l'élaboration se prolonge indéfiniment, se développe, change perpétuellement de forme, absorbe tout et peut tout perdre à tout moment, mais au-dessus de la mousse éternelle de ce continuum élaboratif, la structure promue au rang de personnage ne cessera de flotter, tel un ornement de liège : comme si tout d'un coup je dépossédais un lys blanc de ses contours (que j'ai rendus tout à l'heure d'une manière plus précise par l'intermédiaire d'un cactus et d'une parure blanche de chapeau — que par lui-même), je n'aurai plus qu'un fleuve blanc indéfini, tantôt répandu, tantôt rétréci, errant, sur lequel je jeterai cependant le patron dentelé des contours devenus autonomes. (La peinture utilise cette technique depuis longtemps.) Que faire

donc ? J'avais deux choses en main : les débris de tournesols automatiquement produits, dont la pauvreté et la modicité visuelles n'étaient compensées que par leur apparition dans ma conscience d'une manière biologiquement naturelle — ce qui m'a donc permis de scruter le style secret de la nature — et cette « histoire », création mathématique de l'abstraction consciente, qui s'arrête là. Je ne peux commencer ni par la description de Venise, ni par l'un des réquisitoires du prince, car Venise n'est qu'un point nodal algébrique, et le réquisitoire un signe opératoire sans plus : cette action ne signifie rien, les mots qui la constituent, Venise, prince, juif, luthérien, pape n'ont pas de champ conceptuel propre : ils effleurent les concepts pour leur échapper aussitôt, car ils ne peuvent autrement devenir structure : la structure exclut le « sens ». Il me reste à rechercher un troisième degré, c'est-à-dire une image (une vraie « scène » et non une racine de métaphore comme ces propositions de tournesols), dans laquelle je puisse me mouvoir à ma guise : où les ondes mobiles du temps et de l'espace flottent comme les eaux irrégulières et les vents assoupissants qui affouillent, érodent les angles rugueux de l'intention et du sens que l'on trouve à la surface de certains objets. Ensuite, dans cette image disponible, piper l'« histoire » — et c'est en image insolite, nouvelle que, complètement transformée, mise en miettes, ou en fragments plus importants, elle surnagera, comme des feuilles mortes de marronnier à la surface d'un lac lointain. La meilleure chance que puisse avoir une « histoire », c'est une telle oscillation de feuilles, parallèle à un mouvement d'image inorganique. Le modèle tournesol et les lignes de force de l'« histoire » étaient caractérisés par leur stabilité étouffante, et la troisième image par son aspect direct rédempteur. Direct et pas mouvant du tout, de la même manière qu'un tout petit lac tranquille signifie ouverture infinie : noir miroir de sincérité. La sincérité des lacs n'est pas un geste moral mais le chic optique de l'infinitude : plus je regarde, plus elle

me rapproche d'une couche latente, plus précisément elle exprime la couche en-dessous ; c'est comme une balle de plomb furtive s'enfonçant de plus en plus profondément : ce que l'on désigne peut-être comme mouvement en physique, mais du point de vue spirituel, l'immense obscénité horizontale du lac signifie nudité toujours dénudable, toujours-encore dénudable, de la vie de l'espace ; toute ouverture peut s'ouvrir plus : telle est la sado-suggestion des lacs de jardin tranquilles. La qualité première que je découvre à cette image citée au troisième degré dans le *Schème du Commencement*, c'est son ouverture toujours ouvrante : si je dessine une circonférence, au degré 360 j'ai rejoint le point de départ ; je ne peux plus que grossir le tracé de la circonférence accomplie en continuant de tourner le compas — l'ouverture des lacs tranquilles et celle de l'image employée en phase trois, consistent précisément en ceci : quand j'ai tout à fait « ouvert » (c'est-à-dire quand la sincérité atteint celle d'un gant retourné : nous ne mesurons pas l'ouverture d'une image en degrés, mais avec les unités d'un gant complètement retourné) — et que j'ouvre davantage, je ne vais pas sur-place, je n'ouvre pas sur-place : après les 360 degrés viennent les 361°, 420° degrés de l'ouverture, et le même degré jusqu'à l'infini réel : l'essentiel de l'ouverture c'est que s'y confondent les caractéristiques de la circonférence et celles d'une spirale dont le pas serait infiniment petit, car on peut se représenter la spirale comme des circonférences de 361, 420 degrés, voire infinis. *Apertura sempiterna additiva* : cela peut se concevoir et s'expliquer par des mouvements, mais dans la réalité ce n'en est pas. Ce qui s'oppose, ce n'est pas immobilité et mobilité, mais fermeture et ouverture. A trois endroits du *Schème du Commencement*, il se produit deux gradations opposées : les matériaux du roman ne cessent de rétrécir, tandis que le champ sidéral du roman s'élargit graduellement. Il y a d'abord matériellement l'esquisse de tournesol ; puis l'histoire, et

enfin une image, ainsi maintenant (comme nous allons le voir tout à l'heure) un bateau en construction à Venise.



Frank Brangwyn, *Breaking up of 'The Duncan'* (© David Brangwyn, 2013). Etching.

A première vue, il ne semble pas y avoir rétrécissement matériel des matériaux, mais si nous serrons de plus près ces trois étapes de la « matière » — comme en Chine les marchands de porcelaine anglais la peinture, l'émaillage, les incrustations, la pyrogravure des pots et des vases, des plats et des assiettes : si les rouges sont des colorants ajoutés ou la couleur de la terre etc., en fonction de quoi ils sélectionnent les urnes d'argile — ainsi, nous aussi nous constatons que le donné le plus matériel est la broche fortuite de tournesols, par rapport à laquelle l'histoire est déjà un matériau beaucoup plus dilué, pour

ne pas dire faux, tandis que l'image du bateau en construction ne peut plus rien avancer de matériel : le tout est gigantesque réflexe. Par contre (et par conséquent), le tournesol avec sa mine de rien, avec sa mine de fragment aspire tout l'espace, comme un petit poisson qui se gonflerait à mort pour déglutir tout son pré d'eau ; le sujet, plus pauvre encore et plus restreint du point de vue matériel que le fragment de tournesol, maintient un peu d'espace autour de lui tout de même (comme du thé qui laisse une partie du sucre intact) — finalement, le bateau est comme une porte brisée et anéantie par la poursuite absolue de l'ouverture et par la réduction de l'espace-nu (*perpetuum nudile*). Qu'est donc cette image chargée de constituer le troisième degré dans le schème du commencement, dans mon roman contre la fille économe « discrètement vêtue » ?

A Venise, un soir d'hiver, l'immense coque d'un bateau en construction dans un dock de lagune étroit (on n'a probablement jamais construit de bateau dans un coin pareil) : phoque noir qui dépasse les maisons des alentours. Au flanc du bateau, une grosse tache vert-pré, la lune. De ce côté, les ombres sont si nettes qu'elles enfoncent profondément leurs racines-parasites dans le corps du bateau. Cordage, échelles, enfléchures, poutres abandonnées viennent deux fois comme dans un dictionnaire le même sens en deux langues : ombre et clair de lune. L'air est chaud, mais il neige à rares et gros flocons : autour du navire, l'eau figée en lames de poix est si tendue que les flocons s'arrêtent au point même de leur chute : on les voit un moment devenir étincelles encore plus blanches sur le miroir de l'eau, pour fondre ensuite : une gentille cabriole géométrique précède la fonte — tant qu'ils se balancent dans l'air comme des perruques vertes miniature, ce ne sont que des petits paquets d'étoupe, mais quand ils touchent de leurs branches pointues la surface de l'eau, comme des ballerines qui dansent sur un plateau de verre, ils apparaissent brusquement comme des étoiles régulières, ils se

précisent comme astérisques-étincelles glacées, puis il ne reste à la place qu'un ombilic noirâtre dans la chair engourdie de l'eau, là où la nuit en mal de verre les a avalés. Sur les façades ridées comme des vieilles filles, ils dessinent des points comme on en voit — entourés d'un cercle au crayon — sur les sculptures de plâtre et qui, je crois, sont nécessaires quand on veut les réaliser en marbre ou les couler en bronze (mais je ne sais pas lequel des deux). Les maisons s'étalent en deçà du cristal vert du ciel, comme un reste d'écume sur la table à côté d'une chope verte renversée. Ce n'est pas la pleine lune mais plain ciel, la nuit est pleine d'une clarté printanière que l'on ne peut suivre que quelques marches depuis le niveau de l'eau : après, il n'y a plus que vert vent, printanière germination de l'eau, fausse monnaie ostentatrice de la lune et grand centenaire Danaé de neige. Les nuages se lèvent tout droit comme des sporades blanc-neige, tandis que le cône vert clair du ciel enfonce sa pointe dans la cible inconnue du lointain : tout l'atlas moiré est une hélice rapide, une fugue en tire-bouchon. L'architecture arlequine des nuages compense la fuite brillante et transparente du ciel, comme le grand mât l'écorchure horizontale écumante derrière l'hélice. Autour du navire, silence de mort. L'immense gouvernail émerge complètement, dieu du sens souillé. Quand on voit isolé le « sens » ainsi incarné, on pense spontanément au mauvais sens, comme si la morale était gouvernée par la considération que tout ce qui ne fonctionne pas devrait être perçu comme mauvais. On ne pouvait rien attendre de bon de cet immense gouvernail, rien que de sournois : il était comme le battant d'une fenêtre oubliée ouverte, faite d'ombre et non de verre, et derrière laquelle habiterait l'intention la plus maligne. Car ces coulisses paralytiques du sens au-dessus de l'eau étaient si géantes et impotentes qu'on ne pouvait imaginer de parallèle entre cette nageoire de Lucifer et le menu zozotement délicat et guindé aux quatre vents de la boussole : le compas montrait en sens trop précieux, le

gouvernail une direction trop calibanesque : comment pouvait-il quand même bouger ce gigantesque donjon de requin ? Il ne semblait pas seulement signifier le mauvais sens, mais aussi, d'une manière générale, hérésie du sens : sorties de leur fonction, les choses n'en réalisent pas seulement une mauvaise, mais aussi une proposition dans laquelle la soi-disant fonction est réduite au sophisme, n'existe pas, à sa place, autre chose : à la place des fins artificielles et sophistiquées, la gratuité des éléments mis en évidence. En plus de son immoralité, le gouvernail comportait une ataraxie vaseuse capable de ne se soucier que d'elle-même : dans son obliquité, il y avait une bonne dose de non-sens provoquant, une obstination zodiacale (comme des battants arrachés par le vent n'indiquent aucun sens, sinon celui des étendues de la folie-à-intérêt-limité) jointe à une sérénité féérique de mère-grand. Sa base était couverte de mousse et d'une sorte de plante aquatique, comme les pierres tombales Louis-Philippe de lierres mélancoliques : vase, boue striée, peluche aquatique de première classe, racines en crochets luisaient grisâtres dans les couches inférieures, raréfiées, bon marché, du clair de lune. La pale géante était rattachée à la poupe de navire par un seul point, comme les oreilles à-tout-faire des braques qui ne tiennent à leur tête que par un poil. L'ensemble du bateau était un Janus climatique mal dégrossi : par le bord, il annonçait toute la magnificence d'un printemps clair, enneigé, enluné, tandis qu'à la poupe (probablement à cause des manigances de son coupe-sens) il s'efforçait de conserver — parmi les lambeaux de petites embarcations d'appoint — le monde anachronique du brouillard, du cambouis, de l'ombre moisie, du rhume enrouillé. Au demeurant, ce tableau se complaisait aux traits anachroniques les plus variés : douceur printanière et neige torrentielle, obscurité nocturne et sérénité diurne, marins médiévaux et cargos modernes : c'est à croire qu'à l'aide de ces traits nous avons réussi à étendre encore le paysage, à l'ouvrir à tout vents. Au bout de la lagune, là où elle débouche dans un

large canal, on pouvait voir un petit pont jaune : de travers, mis de travers, chancelant, il ne serait jamais venu à l'idée en le voyant qu'il puisse avoir une destination pratique, il apparaissait comme un supplément au navire, comme son pendant, comme une autre sorte de flottement : le navire, comme le pont est bâti en matériaux pesants, grossiers et indolents, le premier avec des plaques de métal boutonnées sur les bords comme une soutane, le second de pierres serrées en éventail et sans autre fonction, et pourtant, ce mausolée-saumon noir et cette parabole-guignol jaune citron figurent mieux le flottement qu'une gondole légère comme une plume ou qu'une mouette qui gomme l'eau. Le pont jaune délabré est le point le plus clair de la nuit, plus clair que le flanc du navire, rayonné couleur de lune : derrière lui, la sourde monture des maisons noires, au-dessous, l'eau-sécrétion vue en plan, produite avec une glissante abondance par le corps solitaire de Venise. Lequel triomphe plus admirablement de l'eau, du grand poisson réparé ou de cet à-peine-pont chétif, étranglé de reliefs baroques : l'un enfonçant selon les convenances archimédiques dans la « *secretio venetica* » noirâtre et prenant ainsi le dessus sur elle, l'autre faisant des exercices, acrobaties et voltiges absurdes en habits litho-liturgiques sur un écart minuscule. Ils ont probablement produit ce ponceau en construisant un mur épais, un barrage à travers la lagune et, cette muraille terminée, en perçant en trou au milieu, comme on retirerait un bouchon coincé avec un bélier lance-bouchon — ce qui est une solution extrémiste pour bâtir un pont. (En effet, on peut également le faire en catapultant une longue route en l'air juste au-dessus d'un fleuve, de laquelle dégoulineront par intervalles la rangée de futurs piliers). La beauté essentielle de ce ponceau jaune (*pontifex minimus fecit*) tient naturellement en ce qu'il n'a en aucun point la moindre courbure, le moindre élan, le moindre bond ou flottement, chacune de ses colonnes, statuettes et décorations professant la statique nonchalante de l'art continental le plus sec,

et pourtant il réussit à rester suspendu en l'air, et l'eau molle, éparpillée en-dessous ne se doute pas que c'est par la grâce du hasard qu'elle parvient à se jeter dans le canal central de ses désirs.

Tel était donc le troisième degré du *Schème du Commencement* : paysage ouvert (Linné, Pandore Canaletti). Il y a deux choses à remarquer dans cette démarche à trois degrés : premièrement que le premier embryon de métaphore biologique, et le vaste tableau venant en dernier, constituent des extrêmes réguliers ; deuxièmement que dans l'incohérence radicale des trois degrés, le caractère étrange de leur contenu, je perçois cependant comme une parenté logique, mieux, je considère leur lien comme rationnel, parce que du côté de l'image il n'y en a aucun. Examinons tout d'abord les traits-limites du premier et du dernier stades visuels, dont l'un m'est automatiquement venu à l'esprit, alors que j'ai cherché l'autre consciemment. L'automatisme du premier signifie qu'un épisode de la vie quotidienne — en la circonstance le départ d'une théorie du roman accouplé à ma colère contre une fille avare s'habillant avec une pseudo-distinction mesquine — un tel épisode devient, par l'intermédiaire de mon âme ou de mon corps, mon affaire la plus intime : de même qu'une vibration extérieure de l'air provoque en moi un do dièse ou un fa majeur purs, de même un événement extérieur suscite dans mon âme ce lambeau de tournesol, en indiquant qu'il est soudain devenu une partie de mon anatomie : cependant, dans le cas de l'exemple-son, j'ai immédiatement un do dièse ou un fa majeur, tandis que dans le cas de l'épisode-perception — comme le « stimulus » est beaucoup plus ramifié — l'assimilation se fait par étapes et ce tournesol n'est rien d'autre qu'un signal provisoire indiquant que le stimulus-épisode s'est porté sur le plan esthétique intérieur : il s'est transformé en anatome et se fait appréhender comme symptôme esthétique. Le tournesol-fragment ne signifie donc, avec une exactitude et un laconisme absolus que l'incarnation

ou l'encarnation de cet épisode, un supplément minime mais important : une conscience, un champ biologique de réactions se sont attachés à un événement extérieur, supplément qui n'est qu'une décharge entre l'épisode et la souche la plus profonde, inconsciente de l'âme esthétisante. Jusqu'ici, ma volonté ne joue aucun rôle : ce sont les mouvements réflexes les plus profonds de mon instinct qui apportent à l'épisode les premières modifications subjectives, comme si une vague embrassait brusquement une statue de sable ou si une rafale de vent se saisissait d'un brin de mimosa : la première transfiguration de la statue de sable, le premier changement de forme du mimosa, réflexes déterminés dans toutes leurs articulations, passifs, fatals, c'est la soi-disant « force aveugle » qui travaille seule. Tout comme le mimosa par la rafale de vent, l'épisode extérieur est saisi par la couche biologique la plus profonde de ma personnalité, qui produit aussitôt cette métaphore-en-tournesol. Tout cela signifie que le roman, ou la pensée, provoqués par un événement extérieur, sont à ce degré dans la relation la plus étouffante avec l'agencement biologique de mon être : le roman me recouvre comme le papier de soie mouillé que l'on applique sur une statue de bronze : quoique sa texture soit autonome, elle ne donne à voir que la structure inébranlable du moi : roman-détenu, logique-captivité. (Touqué savait parfaitement que l'accentuation du caractère biologique du tournesol était fortement tautologique, mais il pensait que le remède à la tautologie n'est pas le raccourci, la concentration et l'exclusion, mais la mise en place d'un « oscillateur », d'un oscillateur-identité : il résolvait ce problème en annexant à l'étude en question des photos de tournesols, et même des photos de coquelicots et d'hortensias découpées dans un numéro spécial sur le jardinage de l'anglais *The Studio*, et il y faisait porter en oblique un dialogue, le bavardage matinal potager de deux femmes anglaises. Les extrêmes, c'est-à-dire la « définition extrême » et « l'extrême n'importe quoi », devaient pour une fois figurer côte-

à-côte : la vérité s'efforce de s'entourer d'anneaux de plus en plus positifs, mais par une distraction inouïe, elle ne se rend pas compte que c'est une spirale indéfiniment continuable et non des cercles concentriques que l'infra-définition dessine autour du développement [dans le cas présent, autour du caractère biologique du tournesol] et c'est donc au regard vulgaire seulement que la précision semble être un rétrécissement : de par sa pérennité en effet, son trajet est partout pareillement ouvert, impuissant, relâché. Mais Touqué voulait également faire l'essai du délire scolaire de la prolixité, faire tourner un certain temps encore la toupie-bobine phénoménologique ouverte de la répétition de soi, car il sentait que même si au premier degré rationnel il n'y a que piétinement stérile, au degré rationnel second ou n -ème, la tautologie est une pâte logique utilisable. C'est que « la vérité » se compose toujours de deux éléments : d'une spirale indéfinie autour du thème d'une part, formant des milliers de chaînes condensées, mais dont chacune passe dans l'autre, si bien que le sujet à définir survit en arrière dans une pseudo-captivité [il s'agit avant tout d'une technique allemande, comme le mécanisme heideggerien de « l'identité ouverte »] ; d'autre part, d'un oscillateur qui déchire, découpe, détourne, dément, trahit cette spirale indéfinie [ce qu'on pourrait désigner avec une hâte excessive et légère, et plutôt pour mettre de l'ordre dans nos affaires, comme la technique anglaise, par référence au style des essais de Bacon : mécanisme du « rôle sillonnement ludique »]. La vérité comporte donc deux éléments, des orientations incompatibles : on ne peut jamais « refermer » la vérité, tout au plus peut-on pousser la « définition » et l'« oscillateur » jusqu'à leurs extrêmes opposés : en des tautologies mythiques suffocantes d'une part, en un sillonnement anarchique et étouffant de l'autre. On ne peut trouver meilleur oscillateur qu'une conversation sans but.

« ... Hier soir, j'ai entendu un grand bruit sourd, un craquement, je ne sais pas ce que ça pouvait bien être, n'as-tu pas cogné la palissade avec ta voiture cette nuit ? » « Tu te rends compte, je n'ai vraiment pas de chance : on est train de réparer la clôture chez nous, tu sais, tout est démonté, il n'y a plus de porte, on a été obligé d'organiser des rondes autour du jardin. Moi, ces derniers temps, je passe par derrière avec la voiture, là il reste une petite porte en bois... » « Tu tiens aux portes à ce point-là ? Est-ce que la porte est plus importante que le chemin qui conduit au garage ? » « Tu vois, toi aussi tu ris, tout le monde rit quand j'en parle, mais crois-moi, j'ai le mal de mer, le vertige si je rentre au garage par un passage sans clôture. » « Alors, qu'est-ce qui s'est passé hier soir ? » « Notre vieux jardinier avait transporté là derrière, à côté du portillon, les seaux plantés de tournesols qui étaient alignés au pied de la palissade démontée maintenant, il ne pouvait pas penser qu'une fois cette palissade démontée je ferais le tour pour rentrer au garage par ce machin en bois. » « Tu les as cognés, bien sûr ? » « Et comment ! Pourtant, c'était des tournesols peu ordinaires, avec des graines et des pétales énormes. » « Je ne comprends pas, moi aussi j'ai acheté de ces graines mais elles n'ont rien donné. » « C'est peut-être que ton jardinier ne s'y connaît pas. Pourquoi n'as-tu pas demandé au mien ? » « Lui demander à lui ? On ne peut pas imaginer un type plus rébarbatif. Etonnant que quelqu'un qui s'occupe de toutes ces belles fleurs soit aussi grossier, aussi détestable. Tu m'en veux ? » « Je ne t'en veux pas du tout, il n'est comme ça qu'extérieurement, si tu continues à lui parler, il se transforme en gros ours bien gentil, je l'adore. » « Je ne peux pas supporter les gens qu'il faut éprouver pendant une demi-heure comme au jeu de patience, et c'est seulement alors qu'ils deviennent gentils avec arrogance. Ta voiture n'a rien eu ? Toi, comme je vois, tu n'as rien... » « Non, merci, une des ailes a été transformée en chiffon d'étain arraché à une bouteille de champagne, à part ça, je me suis bien amusée ce matin de la fenêtre de ma chambre. » « Pourquoi ? » « Tout d'un coup, j'entends la voix de mon mari en train de discuter avec

quelqu'un dans le jardin, je me lève, je vais à la fenêtre, je vois qu'il est en train d'examiner soigneusement avec un des maçons des pierres cassées au milieu des seaux de tournesols renversés. Je lui ai jeté d'en haut : quoi, cette nuit, j'ai peut-être renversé une amphore de pierre ou un muret fraîchement construit en voulant devenir une voiture biblique qui ne peut rentrer au garage que par le chas de l'aiguille ? Mon mari m'a répondu d'une voix pleurnicharde que ce n'était pas du tout un vase que j'avais cassé, mais pire : que j'avais démoli une grappe de ruines artificielles en construction. » « Ciel ! c'est vraiment drôle : ruiner des ruines. » « Encore heureux que les morceaux de ruines étaient grossièrement marqués de chiffres à la peinture, si bien qu'on pouvait rétablir leur désordre longuement calculé, mais j'ai bien ri. » « Dis-moi, est-ce vrai que les tournesols tournent toujours la tête vers le soleil ? Moi je crois qu'ils n'ont rien à voir avec le soleil. » « Comme tu es honnête d'y avoir pensé, ça ne m'est jamais venu à l'esprit. Tu sais quoi, viens prendre le thé et observons-les de la terrasse, pour voir s'ils se tournent vraiment vers le soleil qui s'en va. » « Je n'ai pas le temps aujourd'hui, j'ai un essayage de robe de chambre. Imagine-toi que ma couturière me réussit une robe de soirée en deux essayages, tandis qu'elle a du mal à finir une robe de chambre en six. » « Tiens, c'est moi qui irai voir tes affaires. Mon mari déteste les robes de chambre, si bien que je ne peux jamais m'en faire faire : il dit que quand il revient d'une promenade à cheval ou d'une partie de tennis pour prendre son petit déjeuner, les poumons remplis d'air, en plein exercice, vêtu d'une simple chemise et d'un pantalon blancs, il ne peut pas supporter d'être accueilli chez lui par une geisha-bluff somnolente, emmaillotée de soie blanche. » « C'est drôle, mon mari aussi m'a dit quelque chose dans ce genre, que la robe de chambre nous estropie : les manches cousues aux genoux, la taille remontée aux omoplates si bien que le motif du tissu reste entier, mais que la femme devient une japonaise bossue, un monstre. » « C'est ça, c'est ça, c'est exactement ça. En effet, j'avais entre autres dans mon trousseau une robe de chambre coupée sens dessus-dessous qui avait l'air d'un

bandage maladroit sur une blessure étendue à tout le corps, mais il y avait un immense tournesol brodé de la manche droite extrêmement fanonée à la taille très serrée... » « A propos ! à propos ! » « Oui, oui. Pour que le tournesol soit bien clairement visible, j'étais obligée de faire toute sorte de mouvements et mon mari détestait ça. » « Moi, j'aime beaucoup les immenses dessins, mieux : sur une de mes robes chambre, le dessin sera plus grand que la robe elle-même. » « Comment ça ? » « Au dos, une moitié du dessin imprimé coupé en deux est appliquée aux omoplates, et celle qui manque, sous forme de plaque amidonnée, est fixée comme une aile d'ange ou une nageoire-Stuart. » « Dis donc, cette couturière, est-ce toujours celle que tu as ramassée pendant les vacances que nous avons passées ensemble ? » « Oui, oui. » « Mais à ce temps-là, tu te plaignais du matin au soir de ce qu'elle n'était jamais à l'heure. » « Je m'en plains toujours, mais elle est très adroite. Je déteste particulièrement les modèles de ces derniers temps. A part ça, maintenant elle vient si souvent que même si elle vient trois fois par semaine, ça ne m'agace plus si elle ne se présente pas le jour convenu. Je ne sors pas, je suis toujours à la maison. » etc. etc. C'est à peu près comme cela que l'oscillateur marche en tautologies.)

L'autre état visuel (la troisième phase) est à l'opposé de celui du tournesol : là règnent la liberté, le jeu perpétuel et l'artificiel sans bornes. Tout entre dans cette image, mieux, il faut que tout y entre pour qu'elle soit parfaite : tout les éléments et toutes les fleurs, les cinquième, sixième, septième saisons imaginables, homme et femme additionnés de quelque genus humain concevable distinct mais non-déduit, toutes les étoiles et toutes les dimensions importantes à la mode : artifice et liberté fonctionnent ici avec un tel élan que tout ce qui compte sept éléments comme les étoiles de la Grand Ourse, les sept jours de la semaine, les sept frères ou parents de l'enfant de Wordsworth, commence immédiatement par le huitième, sans aucune considération pour les sept précédents, qui

ne sont qu'un genre de prologue « comme il faut » devant la vérité, qui commence à huit. Je ne peux donc pour ainsi dire en rien distinguer le roman naissant, dans sa phase première, de mon anatomie : ce n'est qu'une légère retouche aux influx dans le puits de sang qui irrigue paisiblement mon cerveau ; quant à la dernière image, elle déborde de loin mes pensées, ma vie, mes thèmes particuliers, mes théories sur le roman et l'avarice immorale et irritante de la jeune fille, pour enfoncer son delta excentrique et infini dans le panthéisme presque alphabétique et lexical de la liberté. Si je veux donc présenter très fidèlement le portrait de l'amoureuse qui m'inspire de dégoût, il me faut d'abord présenter quelque chose de tout à fait insignifiant, une mauvaise esquisse de tournesol, c'est-à-dire un « détail absolu » ; ensuite toutes choses imaginables au monde : bateaux, ponts, époques historiques et statistiques portant sur la répartition par profession des ressuscités du jugement dernier : c'est-à-dire le « tout absolu ». Les deux reliés par les fils incolores, inodores, immatériels et transparents du deuxième degré : du « sujet » élaboré. C'est ma volonté intellectuelle seule qui relie les trois degrés : je veux que tout cela serve effectivement à ma vengeance nouvellistique qui se prépare contre la jeune fille avare. Je ne tiens que deux symboles : le signe moins et le huit couché de l'infini ; je ne peux rien tirer du « sujet » donné qui se trouve entre les deux. Comme je l'ai déjà dit, ce qui est intéressant d'une part c'est la relation antithétique entre la première métaphore « moins » et la troisième image « infini », et consiste d'autre part, ou plus exactement apparaît, si je fais usage égal des trois phases pour l'élaboration du roman ou de la théorie, ou de chacune par rapport aux autres, ou séparément sur la pensée centrale, je les mets donc en rapport avec la fille avare. Que va-t-il se passer ? Le deuxième essai de Leville-Touqué paru dans la revue *Antipsyché, Vers la civilisation nouvelle du jeu de mots, ou des règles de l'accidentalisme dogmatique*, traitait de ce sujet.

Son point de départ, comme à maintes reprises déjà — l'architecture — voulait attirer l'attention sur un truc très souvent utilisé : l'architecte dessine un carré puis un autre, de telle manière que le deuxième couvre une partie du premier, constituant ainsi une surface commune, la surface de superposition, qui deviendra la forme centrale et essentielle de toute la construction ; si les deux carrés sont sur un plan horizontal, l'étui autonome de l'escalier se dressera au-dessus de la surface commune ; et bien qu'il ne s'agisse pas, on le sent, d'une forme indépendante, mais d'un sous-produit de l'ombre ou de la réflexion relationnelle de deux formes différentes échouées presque au hasard l'une sur l'autre, c'est elle tout de même qui deviendra une des parties les plus importantes du bâtiment. Si les deux carrés ne se situent pas au plan horizontal, mais par exemple au plan de la façade, il y aura sur la surface commune des grilles de balcon doublement serrées, comme sur les cartes là où des régions identiquement hachurées s'entrecroisent, là le réseau statistique des lignes colorées sera deux fois plus dense. Cette méthode permet de très nombreuses variantes, mais l'essentiel reste partout pareil, soit une quantité de formes, elles sont glissées l'une sur l'autre de façon à faire naître des surfaces communes et ces surfaces doubles ou triples « au hasard » deviendront les piliers-essences de toute la construction. Prenons un arbre dont les feuilles ne pousseraient pas comme prescrit dans les manuel d'histoire naturelle, mais sur chaque branche on ne voit que les formations nées du recouvrement de 2, 3 feuilles ou plus, il ne reste donc que les surfaces communes : là où il n'y a qu'une épaisseur, rien ne figure. C'est à ce type d'arbre qu'on peut comparer le style des édifices cités plus haut. C'est une simple pratique du jeu de mots architectural. Prenons un jeu de mots linguistique, par exemple le sobriquet que l'ami d'une femme écrivain lui avait donné : *Hippopocondra Stylopotama*, dans lequel le nom de l'hippopotame rappelle l'hypocondrie connue de cette femme, et son penchant pour

l'écriture. Dans ce jeu de mots, il se passe exactement la même chose qu'en architecture quand on assemble « par hasard » deux figures : le premier carré correspond à « hippopotamus » et le deuxième à « hypocondriaque » ; avec un truc d'ingénieur, je les pousse maintenant l'un sur l'autre et une surface double apparaît, tache linguistique où se superposent hippopotame-vie et hypocondriaque-vie, où elles se conjuguent, et restent à droite et à gauche deux surfaces simples occupées par les seuls concepts d'hippopotame et d'hypocondriaque. Entre l'hippopotame et l'hypocondrie, on ne peut établir aucun lien logique satisfaisant, ils ont fatalement des substances étrangères l'une à l'autre, et nous les forçons l'une sur l'autre ces deux choses, ces deux substances étrangères l'une à l'autre, pour ériger leur zone commune en substance unique et véritable, comme l'architecte qui ne considère pas les foyers d'une ellipse comme centres structuraux de l'édifice, ni les diagonales des carrés comme jonctions internes aux proportions, mais jette sur l'ellipse une forme excentrique, étrangère, inorganique et hasardeuse (par exemple une série de quatre cercles contigus), érige en porteur-de-substance la surface commune ainsi créée, ce qui met en évidence l'état absolument nouveau de la sensorialité substantive des hommes : qui ne peuvent apprécier les dogmes que s'ils sont accidents. L'ancienne substance était toujours le produit mental de la proportionnalité interne, de la régularité géométrique — une sorte de centre de gravité rationnel ; la substance nouvelle est plutôt la résultante du fonctionnement biologique : pour apparaître ou être amorcée, elle a besoin d'une fécondation externe, c'est une forme étrangère qui la saupoudre de son pollen-forme capricieux, et c'est alors qu'elle naît. Ce qu'on peut facilement résoudre dans le corps de la langue et exécuter en architecture doit être réalisable de la même manière dans le roman : l'essentiel venant des trois phases — de la décharge tournesol, du réseau-récit hachuré, du tableau-bateau vénitien infini — c'est ce qui apparaîtra si je superpose légèrement ces trois

états comme trois cartes sur le tapis vert : on voit encore les 3 chiffres distincts, mais les figures, cœurs, trèfles, corps des dames et des rois, s'élèvent au rang de jeu de formes collectif, de substance-jeu. Jeu de mots ne signifie donc pas humour à bon marché, au contraire : c'est une modification s'étendant à toute la culture portant sur l'essence de l'instinct, portant sur l'essence du sensualisme. Prenons par exemple le jeu de mots suivant où l'adjonction grammaticale est remplacée par celle des lèvres humaines : qu'advient-il au baiser si je considère comme jeu de mots la flasque collision des lèvres ? On aura une surface commune aux lèvres et il y aura à gauche et à droite des bouches originelles, le reste non-joint (non-conformiste). La quintessence du baiser ne serait pas la rencontre de deux individus, mais seulement ce qui ne se verrait nettement que si on surchargeait les lèvres de rouge et que l'on plaçait une mince plaque de verre entre les bouches : les empreintes rouges superposées visibles sur les deux faces du verre constitueraient la substance-jeu du baiser, la nouvelle anatomie accidentelle de la bouche, grâce à laquelle on pourra peut-être un jour, mieux que par l'ancienne, guérir les maladies buccales. Ce qui revient à dire que le véritable positivum est toujours un rapport entre deux choses, non pas un rapport judicieux, mais une mise en relation tout à fait fortuite : lors d'une partie, après la distribution, quand on a en mains les cartes attribuées par le hasard, aussitôt on s'efforce de considérer cet éventail fortuit de chiffres et de valeurs sous les yeux comme des vérités premières sur lesquelles baser toute la partie : c'est justement la capricieuse incohérence des cartes qui permet de prévoir le déroulement du principe de la partie, si les cartes arrivaient dans la main en fonction d'un système, on ne saurait trop quelles conclusions en tirer sur l'avenir et sur les partenaires, tandis que plus le désordre est grand, plus la perspective est large, et plus on conçoit un ordre autour et devant soi. Si un architecte bâtit une maison dont les fondements ne sont rien d'autre que la surface

infiniment restreinte produite par le chevauchement ténu de deux ellipses, c'est justement ce hasard de la grosseur d'un fil qui permet d'imaginer les horizons qui flanquent les deux grandes ellipses — tandis qu'une maison elliptique ne nous laisse entrevoir aucun complément dynamique, aucune divination d'espace. Le siècle entier avance vers le jeu de mots — écrivait Leville-Touqué dans son essai. Le jeu de mots est l'expression de l'instinct par lequel nous considérons comme des réalités beaucoup plus durables, comme des étants beaucoup plus caractéristiques des relations dues au hasard, que les choses mêmes qui sont les acteurs de ces relations. On peut ainsi concevoir un nouvel agencement du monde, où les arbres d'une allée disparaissent et où il ne reste que les taches des feuillages qui se recouvrent ; où les éléments des composés chimiques disparaissent, ne laissant pour toute réalité matérielle que le schéma de leurs valences ; où les cellules des tissus s'anéantissent pour laisser place aux rapports qu'elles ont entre elles : là où jusqu'à présent il n'y avait rien, là où il n'y avait que les fils exclusivement logiques d'une relation, donc où il n'y avait pratiquement que vide béant, c'est justement là que vivent aujourd'hui les réalités. Toutes les rives gauches, toutes les rives droites s'estompent, mais le monde se remplira d'un nombre incalculable de ponts durs. Si jusqu'à présent nous nous sommes intéressés à une roseraie pour ses roses, c'est pour les espaces entre les roses que nous nous y intéresserons dorénavant, autrement dit la roseraie ne sera plus pour nous la somme des roses, mais plutôt un pochoir de peintre, une grande plaque de linoléum dont les roses ont été détachées : cette plaque, cette plaque-pochoir peut être considérée comme le champ des rapports entre roses distinctes, si dense que les roses n'y sont plus que des abstractions négligeables. Je disais tout à l'heure que l'essentiel d'une rose est justement ce qui en est caché par une autre rose ou par un bec de perroquet : mais si je ressens trop fortement cette situation de « caché », même quand j'ôte la rose cachant

la première et que je l'en éloigne, j'aurai toujours le sentiment qu'elle la cache et cette deuxième sorte de cache ou coïncidence — bien que le caché et le cachant soient éloignés l'un de l'autre, l'instinct du jeu-de-mots même alors sentira la superposition au moins comme ombre : c'est notamment ce que nous appelons relation. La relation n'est que coïncidence dissoute : les choses même le plus éloignées du monde se jettent mutuellement une sorte d'ombre, on a souvent la situation paradoxale suivante, l'ombre ne coupe rien de l'autre chose, mais simplement ouvre une noire liaison communicante entre les deux, entre deux roses par exemple. Il s'agirait de deux états d'une même situation de jeu de mots : le premier, le plus primitif, le plus naïf, où deux roses effectivement se recouvrent en partie et où la partie commune est la *flos substantialis* ; le deuxième, où les deux roses sont éloignées l'une de l'autre, mais comme si on les avait cousues l'une sur l'autre, et maintenant que je les sépare, la deuxième entraîne avec elle les morceaux de fils qui l'attachaient à la première : c'est à vrai dire à ce moment-là que naît ce que nous appelons relation. (On fabriquait déjà autrefois de la substance par des astuces industrielles de disposition des roses dont nous avons parlé, mais dans une tout autre direction : d'abord on ne mettait pas seulement deux roses l'une au-dessus de l'autre dans une position autant que possible vide de sens — mais dix, trente, deux cents dans un rapport autant que possible significatif, c'est-à-dire les unes exactement fondues l'une dans l'autre, les unes cachant les autres et ainsi [c'est la deuxième différence importante] l'image-substance pressurée était au terme de ce procédé technique ancien le noyau le plus central en soi, autonome, d'un seul objet, tandis que l'image-substance fabriquée par la technique du jeu de mots n'est jamais le noyau le plus intime d'un objet, c'en est au contraire le moignon en surface et superficiel, et elle n'est pas autonome mais plutôt expansive, chose dirigeant vers une autre). La substance-concept nouvelle a donc deux

traits caractéristiques : elle est toujours constituée d'un détail capricieux érigé en dogme (deuxième trait caractéristique) et mutilé par un objet extérieur à lui et auquel il se rattache : ce trait social, pourrait-on dire, est appelé à équilibrer en lui la mutilation en tant que mutilation. C'est sur ce point que l'essai rejoignait le programme de l'*Antipsyché* : car l'âme est un instrument d'individualisation chez l'homme ; elle est tout d'abord un point central doté de sens, un centre de gravité moral, deuxièmement sa force la porte à se refermer sur elle-même. Par contre, la substance nouvelle est d'abord mutilation, et deuxièmement elle conduit d'elle-même en dehors et à autre chose, et ne peut donc pas se préoccuper de l'âme au sens ancien. Il est évident que dans le roman nouveau l'homme et son âme individuelle ne joueront plus aucun rôle : nous oublierons vite l'existence en ce monde d'hippopotame et d'hypocondrie pour ne plus nous préoccuper que d'Hippocondrie, substance nouvelle issue des deux : torse non refermé sur soi (« torse » non pas au sens romantico-statuaire, mais comme cône tronqué, par exemple). En plus de sa valeur rationnelle, pour ne pas dire philosophique, la valeur poétique du jeu de mots est extraordinaire : par le fait qu'il force à l'assemblage deux choses étrangères l'une à l'autre, par le fait qu'il excite très positivement l'imagination — ainsi nous ajoutons à l'image de l'hippopotame le monde d'un poète pâle, maigre et précieusement décadent, d'autre part avec « stylopotame », la notion scientifique de style qui sent l'université est soudain substantiellement envahie par des flots verts d'eaux tropicales. Simultanément nous imaginons, spontanément, que deux choses sans lien entre elles sont des extrêmes, comme les deux fins d'une série extrêmement riche, comme deux bornes d'une exactitude mathématique : au-delà de l'hippopotame, il n'y a rien dans une direction, et au-delà de l'hypocondrie il n'y a également que du vide dans la direction opposée — ainsi par le jeu de mots, qui soude les pôles extrêmes des phénomènes mondains, nous avons toujours

une immense courbe, une amplitude garantie avec laquelle nous résumons les choses du monde : par la prise de ces deux valeurs-limites (car nous les percevons comme telles, ces deux choses sans lien entre elles), nous tenons symboliquement tous les intermédiaires, les milliers de valeurs entre hippopotame et hypocondrie. Après l'analyse et le lancement de la civilisation du jeu de mots, il paraissait indispensable d'examiner dans le roman nouveau le rôle joué par l'homme spolié (et que la vraie société suivra plus tard, bien entendu), autrement dit d'imaginer plus précisément sa non-performance. Les idées de Touqué sur ce problème sont exposées dans une nouvelle étude intitulée *Homme-Style et Homme-Sache*.

Partant d'un souvenir d'amour, il s'efforçait sur un ton de ténor nouvellistique à l'opposé des notes sur la substance dans la manière remâchée. Un été, il avait rendez-vous à Cannes sur la jetée à cinq heures du matin, mais il avait passé la nuit à Nice sans se coucher une seconde. Il avait marché toute la nuit parmi les arbres, en plein vent, pleines étoiles, feuilles, temps, chemin, baignant son âme dans toutes ces catégories crues et vastes de la poésie et de la logique. C'est alors qu'il s'était rendu compte qu'il était, au fond, « un homme de sentiments », comme on disait autrefois. Il en était surpris car, fort de ses expériences sur la substance, chaussé des bottillons pédagogiques des roses cousues, il commençait à se prendre, oh combien ! pour un instituteur de village qui se satisfait de la mise en évidence superflue de ce qui est clair. Il s'était rendu compte plus tard que sous la stérilité mentale du remâchage (et même par-dessus), c'était sa propre sentimentalité massive qui foisonnait : massive, car elle n'est pas une nuance de l'âme, mais un bâtiment indépendant de lui dans l'espace, la tautologie est toujours en effort lamentable, c'est-à-dire par lequel nous tentons de népotiser, comme constituant de l'espace extérieur, inhumain, une idée venant de notre âme. La réflexion vraiment sensée ressemble à un

dosage de quinine par une élégante girl-pharmacienne dans son officine transparente en forme d'ampoule : ici un poids jeté, là une pointe de poudre, un autre poids, un flacon substitué au premier poids, une chiquenaude, on mélange, on retire, on fait pencher la balance, on retient le plateau, à croire que la quinine et les poids, la multiplication et la thérapie, vont s'envoler aux quatre vents de la pharmacie, comme le pollen d'une fleur d'automne, et pourtant tout y reste, parmi les écailles de verre et les tables-filaments. L'autre possibilité consiste à tout jeter sur le même plateau, poids sur poids, quinine sur quinine, pour que tout se renverse et que disparaisse la raison d'être même de la balance, l'égoctrisme à moustache de chat de l'équilibre, et qu'elle soit simplement remplacée par un bloc asymétrique. Les gens croient que le dissertateur-tautologue se délecte du milieu qui entoure sa pensée — tout comme le nez du chien de son entre-cuisses (qu'il y met en dormant) — alors qu'il voudrait plutôt s'en débarrasser, s'en éloigner, s'en aliéner, l'oublier, non par une volte-face, mais par la volonté de se frayer à travers la forêt de ses pensées en se les dépassant. Cette nuit, observant ses sentiments, il n'a pas besoin de faire pencher la balance, elle s'est depuis longtemps renversée toute seule ; sur la grande balance sentimentale du monde, il n'y a qu'un plateau, il n'y a donc pas de sentimentalisme du tout, mais des arbres, des étoiles, des temps et des chemins. Toute ontologie est forcément tautologique, seule l'ontologie de la sensibilité, de l'hypocondrie, récemment tâlée, de la fermentation des souvenirs, n'est pas exposée au danger d'être redondante (au sens grammatical) ; si nous mettons désir sur désir et si encore nous faisons du désir par désir un désir, alors cette répétition découlera sans secousse de la margelle du puits de l'âme en une seule vague claire pour être bu par le grand bassin « ens » de Dieu, de la nature, de l'espace. Les hommes n'ont encore jamais vraiment éprouvé de sentiments, pensait-il avec un courage bien innocent. S'ils en avaient éprouvé, il n'y aurait jamais eu de

poésie lyrique, ce qui veut dire que les sentiments n'ont jamais été assez forts pour balancer le plateau intérieur de l'âme dans le carreau et répandre au travers sa blonde quinine comme poudre de primevère sur le champs anglais et grecs en même temps. C'est ainsi que l'homo-« Sache » lui vient à l'esprit, qui n'est rien d'autre qu'homme-sentiments-seulement, puisqu'il est excessivement sentiments-seulement : il n'est même pas possesseur-de-psyché — pire, il n'est même pas homme, mais masse ontologique-seulement, arbre de douleur, pluie de joie, nuit de désirs, temps du baiser et espace de rêve. Evidemment, arbre, pluie, temps ne sont pas des désinences panthéistiques, mais seulement la signalisation routière naïve et provisoire d'un langage ontologique encore mal connu. Touqué cependant se rappelait la jeune femme et son rendez-vous du matin et trouvait que ça n'avait aucun sens ; la jeune femme tout autant que lui, ils n'étaient que de minuscules vermines dans le champ autonome de ses sentiments d'amour. En affrontant le vent, ce n'était pas ses sentiments qu'il offrait à ce souffle de nuit à l'acide stellaire, comme les filles leurs cheveux à sécher — mais sa petite personnalité d'état-civil qui n'était pas lui, qui ne voulait que la sensation pour la sensation, en dehors de l'homme — qu'il plantait dans le fleuve des sentiments venant de loin. Les femmes sont inaccessibles car elles sont bien plus près de nous que ne l'est notre propre conscience : l'amour, les noces, tout est déjà prêt depuis toujours. Est-ce demain qu'il rencontre cette femme ? Mais tout est consommé, c'est du moins ce que lui disaient les sentiments venant à sa rencontre sur la scène d'école de l'onto-manie. L'idée de la femme, de la rencontre, du matin, lui pesaient terriblement, il lui semblait que tout cela n'était que chipoterie adolescente inactuelle. L'amour est en lui si vaste et le sentimentalisme si infiniment szent-nitouche, qu'il a en horreur la petite dramaturgie sociale de l'amour, ou tout simplement de l'amour, de l'existence même des sexes. Il n'aime que cette froide nuit

niçoise unissant en un seul geste noir le corps de la femme et sa poésie à lui. Cependant, quand on œuvre dans le genre épique, il faut trouver la technique propre à exprimer cette « Sachlichkeit » sentimentale : à exprimer des sentiments qui ne se trouvent ni dans l'âme, ni dans les arbres, mais qui sont des concrets mythologiques nouveaux dans lesquels les névroses décadentes sont si fidèles à elles-mêmes que seule la branche la plus sauvagement réaliste de la scolastique peut les exprimer : elles sont devenues plus fortes, plus positives que l'homme lui-même. Il faudrait tout de même rencontrer cette femme le matin comme il en avait été décidé, bien qu'à le lueur première s'accrochant en parasite vert-citron au reflux, il pleurait la jeune femme comme morte (le fait que nous imaginions autant que possible la mort de la femme et que nous la déclinions au tombeau n'est que manœuvre artificielle en vue d'un frauduleux passage en ontologie). Elle n'était pas là. Il l'attend une demi-heure, puis monte à son hôtel. La chambre est vide, la salle de bains fermée, il n'y a que l'eau lâchée de la baignoire qui gargarise dans la canalisation murale. Il ne frappe pas, mais regarde à travers le trou de la serrure. Elle est assise devant la glace, ou plutôt dans la glace, car dans cet hôtel les glaces à ruban étaient à la mode : elles pouvaient tourner (comme la roue d'un moulin à eau) de telle manière qu'un siège à ressort montait, tandis que la glace s'enfonçait, éventuellement jusqu'en-dessous, et partant les femmes pouvaient se voir dans des perspectives tout à fait furieuses et idiotes, et naturellement elles ne manquaient pas d'en pomper sur-le-champ des allures nouvelles. Le siège était constitué de bandes noires en demi-cercles horizontales et parallèles, dossierer cocaïne sans assise. Entre la sourricière interstellaire du dossierer-inducteur et le bac-lumière inversé de la glace, sur un plancher de verre, reposaient de petites boîtes que la jeune femme manipulait à une fréquence telle qu'elle avait l'air de rempianoter les sous perdus en prise de vue accélérée. A présent, elle se tripotait les sourcils : à la main, une sorte de minuscule brosse

à dents, devant elle sur une soucoupe, encre de Chine, à côté, chiffon sale, taché de noir. Elle avait encore un œil non préparé, l'autre déjà planté d'immenses aiguilles noires, comme ces énormes peignes de fer qui croisent la gamme de rides profondes des marches évanescentes, en haut des escaliers roulants du métro londonien. Il observait les boîtes : longs parallépipèdes du rouge-à-lèvres, petit cercueil vénitien de la poudre ; le vernis-à-ongles est plat comme si on avait fait repasser sur un rail une pièce d'argent anglaise par l'Orient-Express ; pour la crème faciale, un potiquet en porcelaine blanche comme celui de l'obésigène pour enfants malades ; le parfum n'est qu'arabesques de verre, balbutiement de crosse, ou encore galvanomètre de Kelvin à deux bobines ; le fond de teint est une petite couronne princière dont le rouge déduit de la cervelle peut se voir déjà sur les joues de la femme sous forme d'esquisse première couchée. Et ce ne sont ni le regard d'un homme indiscret, ni le désir, ni l'amour qui rayonnent à travers le trou de la serrure, comme des espions lumineux dressés dans un laboratoire de physique — mais une masse ontologique appuyée à une arche de produits de beauté. Touqué n'avait pas honte, il gardait l'opposition comme opposition : ontologie et maquillage, *analogia entis* et cosmétique vide — voilà le récit d'amour. C'est la deuxième fois qu'il cesse d'être raisonnable et humain : la première fois, il était tellement tel qu'en lui-même que cette identité était la cause de la plus grande asymétrie, du plus grand éloignement et renversement ; à présent, la femme est tellement disparue, désintégrée dans la fiction mathématique des produits de beauté, que l'amour conforme aux descriptions livresques est devenu impossible. A vrai dire, elle est dans ses boîtes, crème, poudre, encre de Chine, onguent, fard, et dans ses ustensiles, pinceau, houpette, chiffon, pinces, ciseaux, vaporisateur. La nuit, son amour était le monde même, arbres, routes, temps, étoiles tout ensemble, dans l'Ens-salon du Dieu à la Jacobus Maritanus, son sentiment est celui d'une

existence positive à peine supportable — à présent, c'est une figure à l'anatomie mensongère, artificiellement construite, un jeu, une algèbre, une fiction. L'amour oscille donc entre deux pôles non-humains : la *Sachlichkeit* ontologique et l'artificialité cosmétique radicale. Cela le rendait optimiste. Que pourrait être en épique l'expression la plus fidèle de cet homme-artifice réfugié dans le cosmétique ? Peut-être le fait que le héros (qui, pour les besoins de l'ontologie s'est déjà transformé en une constellation matérielle de douleur) se transforme en style, en structure, en grammaire du roman qui parle de lui, en « homme-style ». Le roman n'est donc pas un objet fermé, mais deux cônes infinis aux sommets arrondis se faisant face, leurs deux miroirs aspirant des aspects différents du héros placé entre-deux. Le premier son âme, son noyau sentimental, le siège de sa sentimentalité, pour le projeter dans le monde absolu, le plus universel de l'existence, au-delà des catégories ; le deuxième miroir conique détache la surface de la surface, la limite extérieure de l'extérieur, pour les faire glisser dans le monde de la fiction, de l'abstraction, du cosmétique, où (à l'opposé du monde raisonnable seulement du premier cône) règne le seul-linguistique, le seul-mot, la grammaire autosuffisante et vide. Touqué avait déjà tenté d'écrire quelque chose dans ce genre sous le titre : *Baiser*. La première partie consistait en une description de paysage (le paysage qui est toujours le premier moyen le plus naturel, de déshumaniser dans un but ontologique) : ciel vespéral, rose crépusculaire avec voiles dorés, l'analyse du rose, idylle, chagrin, feu, couleur du corps, temps, fleur, femme, lassitude, vertu, ironie, aube, rêve de convention ; là : feuilles d'acacia vert-clair : cendre, trait, quelque chose, erreur, sphère d'un arc électrique des premiers temps dans le ciel rose : lumière totale, non-rayonnement total, clarté, isolation de couleur, sans couleur, sans clarté. Faire sentir la plénitude impossible du paysage, l'absolu dieu en tant que nu du paysage, et son chargement-paradoxe infiniment compensé, c'est représenter le contenu

sentimental du baiser, le dépassement du baiser et son aliénation du baiser. La deuxième partie décrivait un fragment d'histoire inconnue : biographie de l'électricité parcourant le circuit-shunt d'un ampère-mètre et les barres de reprise d'ailes des mouettes apprivoisées : intervenaient partout des bouches, des dents, des rougeurs, des parallèles, des chiffres doubles et quadruples, des polarités, des alternativités. Il est difficile de ne pas décrire une fiction cosmétique, mais de faire sentir le bluff par les formules grammaticales mêmes. Ce récit baiser avait encore un sous-titre : « Tentative de définition permanente de l' 'Onto-fict' ». « Onto-fict », ça sonne à peu près comme une enseigne au dentifrice ; Touqué voulait marquer par ce jeu de mots le parallèle indissociable (mais qui ne peut pas être confondu non plus !) entre l'extrême réel et l'extrême mensonge dans la vie pratique et intellectuelle nouvelle.

Touqué pouvait éprouver ce dualisme non seulement dans sa propre vie, mais encore dans d'autres domaines. La même université éditait le même mois deux livres, l'un qui portait le court-titre d'*Ens Ens*, l'autre de *Berkeley*. Les ens-ensistes avaient une seule idée de base : démontrer qu'il n'y a pas de vie psychique individuelle, psychologie zéro, que par contre toutes les impressions qui chevrotent à la surface de notre âme sont de grands courant ontologiques de l'essence, l'incandescence des fils conducteurs de l'existence dans l'homme, tout comme les grilles incandescentes des ampoules électriques, qui n'éclairent pas de leur lyre propre, mais par un immense réseau électrique extérieur. Un mythologisme nouveau est en plein déploiement, les hommes mettent en avant de plus en plus des quantités jadis négligées, méprisées, et les hissent au plan mythiquement positif de la réalité ; tout comme les dogmes qui jadis pérégrinaient dans le champ de l'hallucination, à présent les ombres nerveuses les plus filantes arrivent nommées, incarnées, au sanctuaire ontologique des dogmes avec une concrétude infinie. Le livre

Berkeley avait également une seule idée de base : un idéalisme nouveau et outrancier est en plein déploiement, car les hommes se sont rendu compte qu'ils ne peuvent connaître dans leur nudité immédiate l'essence des choses, les stades ultimes de la vie et de la matière, car la pubère tension de l'existence est si fantastique qu'on ne peut distendre cet anneau de chasteté et qu'on ne peut donc remplacer la structure de base réelle que par des signes symboliques, que par des masques mathématiques. L'idéalisme excessif berkeleyien avait autrefois une certaine saveur mélodramatique — « il nous faut renoncer à la connaissance de la réalité » — ce qui fait totalement défaut au néo-berkeleyisme : l'exigence ontologique est à vrai dire une exigence primitive et barbare, et les grands systèmes de fiction qui occupent la place de la « réalité » satisfont pleinement à l'exigence plus raisonnable d'une « réalité vraisemblable à l'homme ». Après avoir lu d'affilée les deux ouvrages, Touqué savait bien qu'ici il n'est pas nécessaire de « choisir » : il acceptait l'un et l'autre, car dans ses expériences les plus personnelles, dans ses aventures amoureuses, chacun trouvait une garantie également tranchante. En lisant des livres de physique nouveaux, des chapitres d'optique, il en avait retenu diverses choses dans ce genre : que la lumière s'est exprimée simultanément aux particules de matière les plus médiévales et aux nuages de probabilités, aux hypothétiques brumes célestes et champs d'incertitude d'une saveur très berkeleyienne — d'une part la matière naïve, de l'autre la fiction de Broglie. Tout phénomène se constitue de l'hétérogénéité de l'existence et du délire : l'être étant pendant un certain laps de temps une nuit noire ontologique, puis une clarté symbolique aveuglante, pour se replier de nouveau dans la matrice égoïste-bleue du réel, mais pour n'y point demeurer. Ni l'obscurité ni la folie de lumière ne permettent la vision, et il serait vain d'en attendre un éclairage provisoire tamisé dans le style contemporain. Son amour pouvait-il avoir un sens dans ces conditions ? Les désirs, les sentiments n'aboutissent nulle

part, ils tournoient sur l'océan infini de l'existence sans vouloir vraiment quoi que ce soit (le « vitalisme » n'est que le jouet cogital des weekendeilleurs sans-plaisir, l'« ontologisme » breuvage obscur et chtonien des tragiques), on ne peut jamais faire fleurir dans un monde supérieur les bourgeons éclos là-bas, on ne peut jamais réaliser les projets nés là-bas, car c'est l'univers de sous les eaux aux néréides funéraires immergé des éternelles prémisses, qui tourne éternellement vers lui-même sur les serpentins bleu indigo d'un tourbillon en ombilic sans fin. Quand les amoureux font des projets pour le lendemain, apparemment ils se réalisent, tout comme Touqué qui lui aussi aurait finalement rencontré la cannoise à cinq heures-et-demie du matin, mais le projet et tout ce qui s'ensuit n'ont pas de rapport entre eux, la rencontre n'est qu'une équation mathématique factuelle de Broglie pour exprimer approximativement et d'une manière plutôt hypothétique la rencontre ontologiquement idéale. Tout amour est d'abord « quelque chose » que l'homme ressent avec une exaltation mythologisante et une détermination physique, puis le simulacre de ce quelque chose de clos, identité inaccessible (qu'on peut plutôt scéniquement signaler qu'exprimer) qui longe et chevauche en éternelle conditionnalité cette « chose » avec la saveur mensongère du symbolisme — épuisante série de jeux arbitraires et dans l'air. C'est peut-être le vingtième siècle qui découvrira et définira le « sentimentalisme théologisant », les forces absurdes, les vagues bleues gratuites et extra-vitales des sentiments (ontologie n'est pas vie !), que Touqué avait vécus dans sa grande solitude, et où la joie, les pleurs, le désir, les interrogations étaient devenus des « Sache » classiques, ce qui était un record bien plus important que celui de Werther. C'est en vain que reviennent les lendemains aux calendes des amoureux, le sentiment du demain ne se transforme pas en sentiment d'aujourd'hui dans leur âme, il reste une vague à venir, qui roule en soi ses eaux sonnantes de droite à gauche en dehors

du temps, pose en lamé. Ce n'est pas le sentiment de l'accompli qui mousse dans l'étuiche du lit nuptial, mais le commencement d'un désir, le commencement du commencement, car l'amour n'évolue pas, les sentiments ne se transforment pas sous l'influence des événements de la vie, pas plus que les caractéristiques de la lumière ne se modifient sous l'influence des intermezzos de Broglie. Dans son essai intitulé *Elégance et Schisma Moralis*, Touqué examinait également la dualité ontologie/sentiment et action/fiction arbitraire. Dans la mode féminine, dans le style des robes du soir, des costumes de golf et surtout des maillots de bain (été 1933) il avait décelé une lutte dramatique entre l'existence et la fiction, entre l'homme humanissime et l'homme styliste, entre l'homme anatomique et l'homme déshumanisé — et leur vaine volonté d'identification et d'interpénétration : dans le maillot de bain, les deux phases de l'existence et de l'arbitraire s'enlaçaient comme les branches gauche et droite du chiffre huit. Dans la vie éthique, à l'opposé de l'enlacement et au-delà du chiasme mondain, il caractérisait justement la disjonction totale : parallèle impuissant de l'onto-morale et de la ficto-morale (pour utiliser les vocables de l'enseigne au dentifrice). C'est d'aujourd'hui que date la vraie saison scientifico-expérimentale de ces hommes qui commettent perpétuellement des crimes et sont quand même bons, et de ceux qui peut-être accumulent propreté sur propreté et sont entièrement mauvais : simplement parce qu'entre la couche ontologico-morale et la couche performante, il n'y a pas le plus pâle rapport, il n'y a pas le plus naïf, le plus mince ponton pour une transfusion. Pour Touqué, la mode et l'éthique étaient des objets d'étude par excellence, car c'est là que l'être-deux de l'homme-Sache concret et de l'homme-style fictif est le plus évident : dans la mode, ils se croisent en X ; en éthique, ils sont parallèles, ou plus exactement s'accompagnent dialelliquement. Qu'est-ce que cela signifie pour l'épopée ? Autrefois, le milieu et le récit

venaient ensemble en un tiède mélange ; aujourd'hui, les objets propres au milieu et le récit qui se déroule parmi eux sont dissociés et courent côte à côte. Il y aura distinctement des romans de choses (c'est la branche ontologique) et des romans hyperévénementuels (c'est la manie de la fiction). Touqué aurait voulu écrire des grands romans-catalogues mythiques sur ses objets préférés, tels que : ponts, puits, navires, lacs, bas de femme. Et aussi des romans événementuels complexes auxquels la totalité des intrigues possibles des drames anglais sanglants du 17^e et celle des romans policiers modernes auraient été intégrées. Ces contradictions s'épuisent déjà dans les deux phases du *Schème du Commencement* : possibilités à la fois étrangères et apparentées du thème et du bateau. Cette dualité épique correspond aux points nodaux et aux parties oscillatoires des ondes stationnaires : quand ces ondes sont réfléchies, elles ont des points d'intersection anoscillatoires à la distance d'une demi-amplitude (ponts, puits, navires, etc.) ; par ailleurs, l'ensemble du phénomène représente un drame double par réflexion (ultra-Webster) : la passivité infinie et le mouvement infini se supposent et s'engendrent mutuellement. Il avait fait une fois le voyage de Paris pour assister à un spectacle Plaute moderne dans un petit théâtre, dont le metteur en scène était une ancienne connaissance niçoise. Dans le train, il avait lu des revues néo-thomistes traitant des épistémologies néo-réalistes les plus diverses, sous la sempiternelle présence du *veritas fundatur in esse rei* ou culte de la réalité. A Paris, au dehors du train, les porteurs, les affiches Cinzano, les comptoirs des cafés l'encerclaient avec une plénitude malade d'objectivité indépendante de sa volonté ; les choses étaient possédées de la paralysie acute de l'Esse. Le soir, il était allé voir le Plaute : un guignol dans une maison de fous : les personnages avaient des masquillages mortellement et cyniquement de travers, leur voix était un mélange de miaulements d'eunuques et de crétins, leurs mouvements épilepsie d'artistes et de

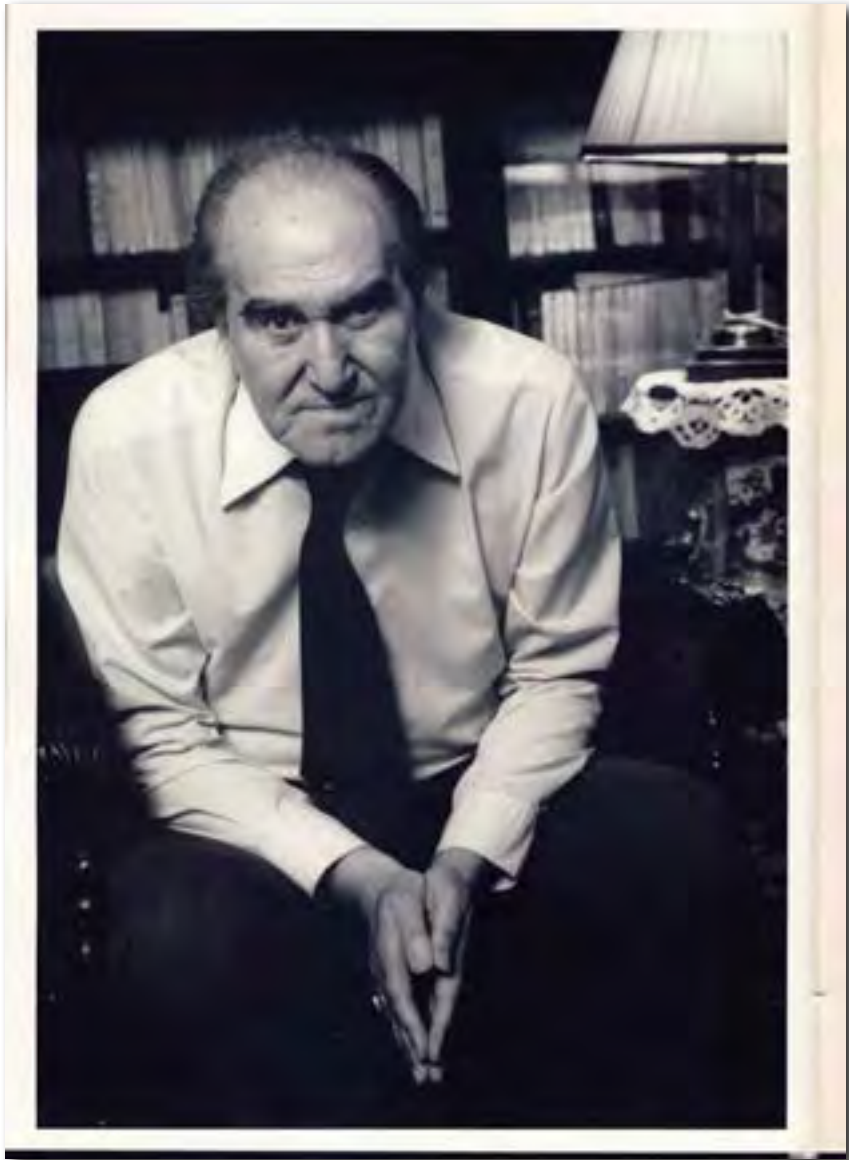
kangourous, la musique une chanson enfantine sur un texte pornographique incompréhensible, comme si on n'était pas parmi des hommes mais parmi des numéros de paranoïa. On se rendait parfaitement compte du travers du masquillage : il suffit parfois dans une formule de déplacer d'un rang à gauche les indices au bas des signes (ainsi les indices-feuilles des arbres penchés par grand vent se déplacent-elles d'un rang de feuille), le quatre prend la place du trois, le trois celle du deux, c'est-à-dire que les signes restent à leur place mais qu'en bas il se produit un déplacement général : ici également sur la scène, les caractères étaient à peu près maintenus dans une identité de cas-limite vertigineux, mais le masque leur pendait comme un indice décalé juste de la distance d'un homme, avec le « sarcasme mortel » d'une différence déraisonnable, car tout le jeu n'était que critique et mort. On sentait que l'unité d'ironie, de déshumanisation par le masque était juste de la longueur d'un homme, on voyait toujours un homme régulativement différent dans l'homme observé. Marionnettes, bouffons, animaux et imbéciles : alors que Touqué les regardait faire des culbutes parmi les décors criards et bariolés, les notions ontologiques du *Bulletin Thomiste* continuaient de lui écarteler le cerveau, et il sentait qu'il aurait également besoin des deux choses, sinon toute sa vie, du moins ses quelques mois de jeunesse à venir.

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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Miklós Szentkuthy



P R A E

(úryvok)

I.

Od zážitku k vyjadreniu:

súpis najobyčajnejších

možností

Leville-Touqué uvidí klobúk: nájsť prvého hravého spoločného menovateľa ženskej módy a filozofie

zárodky a problémy vyjadrenia:

A) tri nesúvislé východiskové body

1. fragment slnečnice v mozgu vyplývajúci z biologickej spontánnosti

2. s racionálnou svojvoľnosťou naplánovaná „téma“ (absolútna *téma*)

nerozvinuteľnosť každej téme podobnej témy

3. veľký výjav vyjadrujúci absolútnu „náladu“: stavba lode v Benátkach v noci

vzťah tautológie a oscilátora

B) ako sa dajú použiť, spojiť vyššie uvedené tri prvky: nutná relativizácia

pojmov súvislosti a nesúvislosti:

1. slovná hra so slovami

2. slovná hra s prvkami priestoru: moderná architektúra

3. „slovná hra“ z prvkov začlenených pod A)

nové gurmánstvo substancie

C) zánik (alebo nadrealizácia) „človeka“ alebo „románového hrdinu“
v dehumanizujúcej románovej technike

vstrebáva sa do čiastočne priontologickej, čiastočne prifiktívnej
vrstvy

oddeliť „predmetový“ román od „hyperdejového“ románu

Leville-Touqué napísal do svojho časopisu *Antipsyché* článok na tému *Schéma začiatku alebo Nová kompozícia*. Ako príklad mu poslužil pomyselný románopisec alebo možno filozof, ktorý sa do roly románopisca vteľuje len preto, aby pre svoju novú logiku nazbieral argumenty aj z inej oblasti, a nechal túto postavu pozorovať onen bod, ktorému nepredchádzala ešte žiadna logická či umelecká inšpirácia na napísanie nového systému či románu, no v ktorom sa už hlási prvý zárodok inšpirácie: a pomocou tohto prvého zárodku a jeho bezprostredných pokračovaní sa usiluje skúmať povahu novej kompozičnej módy, špeciálny vzťah analýzy a jednoty, náhody a zákona. Po *Schéme začiatku* svoje závery tézovito zhrnul v druhom článku *K novej kultúre slovných hier alebo O pravidlách dogmatického akcidentalizmu*.

Obsah prvého článku je nasledujúci: už mesiace som bol zaľúbený do dievčaťa (článok bol totiž napísaný v prvej osobe), s ktorým som si jedného slnečného predpoludnia prezeral parížske výklady, pestré pulty kvetinárstiev, klenotníctiev a drogérií, keď sme prišli pred klobučníctvo. Za sklom bolo vidno len jediný klobúk, ale aj ten pripomínal klobúk iba vzdialene: mal tvar malej poglobule a skladal sa z dvoch častí, jedna pozostávala z ligotavých a tenkých niklových rúrok, pričom priestor medzi nimi bol prázdny, akoby medzi mrežami, zatiaľ čo druhú časť tvorila akási tenká, zelenkavo sivá blana, o ktorej som nevedel zistiť, či je z kovu, papiera, skla alebo z textilu. Pri pohľade na tú skvelú štruktúru ma omráčila rozkoš, no dievča zostalo

pomerne chladné. Mal som pocit, že pre jar sa nedal zhotoviť krajší symbol ako tento spoly logický, spoly rádiotechnický klobúk: aj na jari mi vždy lahodila akási naivne rebrovitá zákonitosť, racionálna inšpirácia uvraveného poriadku (výborne to zobrazoval strapec niklových rúrok) a zároveň paradoxné svetlo, iskrivé prítmие, ťarbavá istota a vedomá neistota inštinktov (toto zas predstavovala tá nafúknutá druhá časť klobúka, poskladaná z nedefinovateľnej látky).

Zrejme je nápadné, že môj mozog symbolizuje prostredníctvom značne hrubého mechanizmu, ale už tu chcem so zvyčajnou brutalitou didaktiky predviesť čosi z príchute mojej mánie: tesnú a inštinktívnu súvislosť najuniverzálnejších a najhmlistejších pocitov (ako napr. onen zložitý pocit, ktorý vnímame vo vzťahu k jari a ktorý by sa dal nazvať jej nekonečne privátnou definíciou), ich túžbu po súvislostiach, dychtivú techniku vytvárania súvislostí pomocou hazardne odlišných vecí, napríklad týmito niklovými rúrkami a skleným vrecúškom vo výklade s klobúkmi.

Čo mi chcel ten klobúk povedať? Tú ligotavú meravosť rúrok, rebrovito objímajúcich zatiaľ ešte nejestvujúci malý glóbus ženskej hlavy, odjakživa pokladali za stelesnenie pravidiel, systémov, logických diferenciácií, kapitol a pôdorysov: rúrky sú večnými lokajmi symbolov poriadku. Keď tieto kovové vlákna a niklové liany prilnú na čiernovlasú alebo plavovlasú lebku, klobúk nad ňou vytvorí prísne obratníky Raka a Kozorožca, pedantné rovníky a greenwichovské struny: mozog a mikádo budú uväznené medzi škorpiónmi klepetami pravidla. Ale pravidlo, ktoré spomínané rúrky predstavujú, predsa len neznamená staromódnu klietku pravidiel: jednak uhol ich sklonu sa vyznačuje akousi grotesknou ochotou a jednak ich svetlo oplýva akýmsi prehnaným, cynickým ligotom, oslepujúco bielym iskrením: pôvodný poriadok, puritánska schéma, ktorú takéto meravé a rovnaké liany zakaždým predstavujú, sa vychýľuje jednak k svetu burlesky, humoru a hry, jednak k svetu luxusu, samoúčelnej elegancie a asketickej pózy.

Tento dvojaký odklon neznamená poškodenie poriadku, ale naopak jeho bohatstvo: v tej chvíli som naivno-sebavedomým č uchom objaviteľov vytušil, že sa mi otvárajú nové možnosti kompozície, nové spôsoby výstavby: trochu humornej deformácie na jednej strane, trochu divadelnej dekoračnosti na druhej strane vyjadria večne požadovaný a nenahraditeľný umelecký alebo logický poriadok oveľa energickejšie než súbežné drôty starej klietky poriadku. Podstatu krásy krásnej ľalie oveľa precíznejšie vyjadrím dvoma vyumelkovanými nepresnosťami: groteskným kaktusom (to je hra), ktorý sa na ňu ako-tak ponáša, a rozmarnou ozdobou klobúka (to je mondénnosť) vyrobenou z ligotavej priemyselnej hmoty: súčet karikatúry a praktickej okrasy má vytvárať poriadok umenia a náuky o pravdivosti.

Ale tam na ulici som sa od výkladu naučil aj niečo iné. V tom čase som už prečítal celkom slušné množstvo kníh, v ktorých filozofia s určitou grandezdou uzákoňovala svoju hypochondriu: pojem pojmu, základ základu, možnosti možnosti, infra princíp predchádzajúci predpokladu predpokladajúcemu všetky predpoklady („reine Und-heit“, „absolutes Sotum“), najzákladnejšie rozumové danosti, slovom tie puritánsky vzrušené knihy analyzovali celú tú „hyperlogickú prelogiku“.

Lebo nepochybne boli puritánske: za pojmami konvenčnej pravidelnosti, inteligencie, systematickosti, konzekventnosti hľadali ešte základnejšiu pravidelnosť a systematickosť: nejaký taký základný poriadok, ktorý sa na naše doterajšie pojmy poriadku už takmer ani nepodobal; bolo to absolútne fiasko alebo triumf puritanizmu (či triumf jeho zlyhania?), zatiaľ čo absolútny poriadok tvorili nejasné vlákna, bunkové torzá a plazmatické secesie. Lebo po prečítaní nemeckých fenomenológií a náuk o pravdivosti som nadobudol dojem, že tým logickým infrám, poriadkom predchádzajúcim poriadku a absurdným bodom origa úplne chýbajú určité geometrické alebo „kompozičné“ č rty pojmu poriadku a skôr sú len hypotetickou galériou opalizujúcich rámov, váhavých náčrtov, Proteových portrétov. Sem viedlo

bigotné hľadanie poriadku, sem viedlo skutočne puritánske puritánstvo.

Tu si opäť berie slovo moja pedagogická netaktnosť a práve pojem poriadku bude ženský klobúk, videný vo výklade, symbolizovať svojou druhou polovicou, tou zvláštnou, neurčitou, no masívnou hmotou, o ktorej som nevedel, či je to sklo alebo súkno. Pred výkladom som teda dospel k trom pojmom, ktoré sa všetky viac-menej vzťahovali na „poriadok“, „pravidlo“: burleska, mondénnosť a infralogika.

Spýtal som sa už i tak značne ľahostajne sa správajúceho dievčaťa, či by chcela taký klobúk. Sucho odvetila, že by si ho nasadila nerada, lebo by mala pocit, že na hlave nemá klobúk, ale – ako som jej pred chvíľou povedal – rádiovú konštrukciu alebo zniklovatenú maškaru z vyoperovaných artérií. Ostatne, aj tak nerada utráca na takéto somariny.

Keď jarný fetiš, z ktorého som začínal vylamovať boileauovské pravidlá nového románového štýlu, nazvala somarinou, mal som pocit, ako keby mi strelila revolverom do hlavy. V mihu som pohľadom preletel po jej oblečení ako dáky krvilačný daňový exekútor po zložkách pravdepodobne falošného inventára: na nohách mala ploché trotteurové topánky, nad nimi husto tkané hnedé bavlnené pančuchy; sivý anglický kostým s dvoma gombíkmi, s opaskom a so sivou prackou, na hlave sivý plstený klobúk s úzkou strieškou, omotaný jedinou plstenou stuhou. Celá moja láska zrazu stratila zmysel: nemám sa čo krútiť okolo takzvaných „diskrétnych“ šiat. Vedel som totiž, že dievča má veľa peňazí a chýba jej vkus. Krátko nato som sa s ňou nevlúdne rozlúčil, zúrivy, zúfalý, rozpalovaný nenávisťou voči nej.

Dosiaľ v mojom príbehu účinkovali dva dôležité motívy: teória v zárodkoch a obrovská zúrivosť, zúfalstvo a nenávisť. Pre moju predstavivosť to bol ideálny stav: počiatky vyumelkovanej teórie spárené so silnou nenávisťou.

Tie dve zložky, kostra teórie a masa emócií, sa zrazu zjednotili v podivnom súčte vektorov, totiž v nečakanom, cudzom, zdanlivo úplne nezmyselnom fragmente jedného obrazu, presnejšie vo zväčšenej metafore. Videl som dve alebo tri obrovské slnečnice s veľkými čiernymi kvetnými lôžkami a s krátkymi žltými lupeňmi, ktoré, pokrčené a akoby tlejúce, boli nad bledomodrým jazierkom rozmiestnené podobne ako perie a koruny, ktoré na erboch zvyknú obklopovať štít. Hoci som tento obraz zatiaľ nepotreboval, cítil som, že nahradil môj pokus o teóriu a citové nasýtenie, potlačil ich a odpojil z aktuálneho diania.

Bolo to príjemné i nepríjemné zároveň: užíval som si hypnotický dar v podobe výjavu so slnečnicami, jeho liečivé prekvapenie, no trápne mi pri tom chýbala gymnastika konzekventnej myšlienky a vôle, šitá na mieru môjho tela. Len pred chvíľou som cítil v každom svojom kroku neúprosnú agresivitu divej zveri maširujúcej za korisťou, teraz však každý môj krok bol prázdny ako šrapnely v bytoch vojakov slúžiace ako okrasné predmety, iba nad hlavou sa mi s koketnou vytrvalosťou vznášal nezvaný hosť – metafora. Tohto môjho dotieravého a bezmenného priateľa nazývam radšej metaforou než obrazom preto, lebo cítim, že sa na niečo vzťahuje, že je iba súčasťou niečoho ďalšieho: možno je čímsi viac alebo menej než iba symbolom.

Už prv som naznačil, ako rád som skúmal organické vzťahy medzi čímsi univerzálnym a čímsi úplne hazardným; nazdával som sa, že aj teraz stojím pred takouto úlohou: moje pokusy o teóriu a elementárna nenávisť voči ženám nijako nesúviseli so slnečnicovým zátiším, no to druhé sa mi vo vedomí vynorilo s takou náhlou určitosťou, že som predsa len medzi nimi tušil úzky vzťah. Keď som sa zblížša prizeral nástoľčivému slnečnicovému daru, mohol som sa presvedčiť, že neobsahuje nič obrazové: hoci celok tvorili obrazové prvky, bol to charakteristický metaforický príznak, ktorému dominovalo len zopár protikladov a zopár línií – čierne kvetné lôžko sa dalo vidieť úplne zblízka, bol to detail detailu, takmer len čierny dôraz; lupene sa

iba mihali, žlté, chvejúce sa motory, a zôkol-vôkol ich nebolo vidno. Ako keď sa človek očami priveľmi priblíži ku kvetu a kým na jednej strane pred ním narastú detaily, na druhej strane vidí veľmi zle a rozmazane. Žeby mikroskopické videnie v zbernom tele tohto kvetu zodpovedalo začiatkom teórie a rozmazané videnie bujneniu emócií? Cítil som, že ten nečakaný obraz má nejakú logiku, no tušil som i to, že nie je taká ordinárna, ako som si to v prvej chvíli predstavoval.

Keďže ma grátis slnečnice neuspokojili, vrátil som sa k svojmu predchádzajúcemu stavu: k teórii kompozície a k hnevu a usiloval som sa vymyslieť dajaký príbeh, aby som ním vyjadril svoj odpor voči diskrétnemu odievaniu a voči mojej dievčenskej známosti, ktorá ho reprezentovala. Takto som prešiel do ďalšieho stavu, na nasledujúci stupienok v *Schéme začiatku*.

Proti tej skúpej žene som vymyslel nasledujúci príbeh: isté španielske knieža sa kedysi zaľúbilo do dievčaťa, ktoré ho však neľúbi. Rozídu sa a už sa nestretnú. Dievča sa stane rehoľníčkou a čoskoro sa o nej rozchýri, že je svätá: jej hlavnými cnosťami sú šporovlivosť a odpustenie; zle nakladá s kláštornými pokladmi, rozdáva ich a pokojne znáša útoky voči sebe i kláštoru. Majetok kláštora pomaly prechádza do rúk benátskych kupcov semitského pôvodu: aj dievča, o ktorom sa vie, že je svätica, pochádza z pokrstenej sicílskej vetvy jednej benátskej kupeckej rodiny, ale to ostatné rádové sestry netušia. „Svätá“ predstavená (lebo zakrátko sa ňou stala) nečakane umrie: začne sa proces jej svätorečenia. A tu sa vlastne začína príbeh.

Medzi vynikajúcimi kňazmi a veľkňazmi, ktorí sa poschádzali na proces svätorečenia, je aj španielske knieža, niekdajší milenec ženy určenej na svätorečenie, z ktorého sa takisto stal kňaz a vo svojom povolání rýchlo vynikol dialektickým dôvtipom, horúčkovitým a erotickým racionalizmom, ktorý teraz, pri príležitosti procesu, chce použiť ako odporca svätorečenia.

Uvedomuje si, že proti svätorečeniu dievčaťa sa nestavia preto, lebo svojho času neopätovalo jeho lásku, ale preto, lebo celý typ jej askézy považuje za charakteristicky nekresťanský, ba antikatolícky: na základe spisov a výrokov, ktoré po dievčati zostali, chce dokázať, že jej skromnosť má korene v merkantilistickej lakomosti a jej odpúšťajúca veľkodušnosť je vlastne ľahostajnosť voči pravde, jej puritanizmus je nevedomá lenivosť a čo sa týka praktickej stránky veci: materiálne statky kláštora, ktorých sa s toľkým príkladným sebazaprením zriekala, stali sa majetkom semitských kupcov a tí ich utratili na ženy, víno a najmä na výrobu zbraní, ktoré kúpil turecký sultán, keďže proti kresťanskej Európe chystal pustošivú vojenskú výpravu.

Siahodlho rozoberá rozdiel medzi exotickým (čiže naozaj katolíckym) sebazaprením a naivno-kupeckým laickým puritánstvom: v tom druhom nevidí opovrhovanie hmotou, ale takpovediac jej vedomý kult, ktorý hmotu nelikviduje, ale ju hromadí, takže luxus, márnenie peňazí na umelecké kratochvíle alebo na roztopašnosť, je ešte vždy morálnejším spôsobom nakladania s peniazmi ako sporenie. Podarí sa mu dokázať, že predstavená udržovala v kláštore taký krajný štýl chudoby preto, lebo vo svete nenašla hodnotu, čo by svojou veľkoleposťou prevyšovala hodnotu, ktorú pre ňu mali peniaze. Vo svojej obžalobe (lebo to bola obžaloba) celý kláštor charakterizuje ako temný symbol „materialistického sebazaprenia“.

Medzitým sa náhodou dozvedá, že zosnulá predstavená pochádza zo sicílskej vetvy jednej slávnej benátskej kupeckej rodiny, práve z tej rodiny, ktorej člen kedysi majetkovo zachránil rodinu kniežaťa. Knieža odcestuje do Benátok, kde chce pozorovať kupcov: tu sa stretne s novým pápežom, o ktorom sa dozvie, že prechováva sympatie voči luteránom. Tento nový pápež našiel hŕbu rukopisov od zomrelej predstavenej, v ktorých vykladá katolícke dogmy s najčistejšou možnou ortodoxnosťou. Luteranizujúci pápež chce preto zabrániť svätorečeniu a je veľmi šťastný, že sa v Benátkach stretol s chýrnym a vzdelaným odporcom svätorečenia. Pravdaže, knieža nie je

ochotné dohodnúť sa s pápežom, ktorý na cnosti bývalej predstavenej útočí z hľadiska puritanizmu s príchutou protestantizmu. Knieža neznáša rovnako jednoduchosť kupeckého pôvodu, ako aj protestantskú jednoduchosť a svoju obžalobu proti cnostiam predstavenej stiahne, lebo nechce byť zajedno s pápežom.

Knieža zmizne v Benátkach. (Semitskí kupci, diplomatickí luterovci a jeden zmiznutý katolícky apologéta: ça, c'est pittoresque!)

Zhromaždenie, ktoré prerokúva svätorečenie na Sicílii, kam súčasne z dvoch strán prichádzajú dvaja hostia – zo severu pápež, z juhu, na lodiach, turecké vojsko –, sa ešte nerozpáchlo. Pápež nie je nik iný ako machiavellisticky zmýšľajúci luterovec, ktorý sa na pápežský trón dostal pokryteckým spôsobom, využijúc svoju rečnícku a literárnu genialitu, a teraz chce terorizovať katolíkov. Na čele tureckého vojska zasa stojí to dievča semitského pôvodu, ktoré chce sicílske zhromaždenie práve teraz vyhlásiť za svätú. Dievča teda žije: celá jej rehoľnícka kariéra bola povrchná (nie pokrytecká!), utiekla prvou tureckou loďou, na ktorú ju zlákali. Namiesto nej pochovali cudziu, pašovanú mŕtvolu. Turci rozprášia koncil, no dievča, takisto ako knieža, zmizne v Benátkach.

Ak môj pokus o teóriu a nenávisť voči dievčaťu budem považovať iba za prípravu a mimovoľný fragment so slnečnicami za prvú fázu v *Schéme začiatku*, potom tento vypracovaný príbeh je druhým veľkým krokom v mojom románovom vývoji.

Tento druhý krok charakterizuje vedomé snovanie abstraktných dejových línií: množina orientačne vykreslených dilem, uzlov tragédií a mechanicky zhustených mravných kríz – v nich sa vybíjala moja nenávisť voči dievčaťu. Táto nenávisť azda oveľa menej smerovala proti dievčaťu, ktoré sa „oblieka podľa diskkrétnej módy“, než proti tým širokým masám ľudstva, v ktorých sa verí, že „diskrétnosť“ toho dievčaťa je prejavom cnosti a panskosti, a nevšimnú si, že ide len o obyčajnú kupeckú malichernosť, húževnatú

skúpost! Keď som nechal turecké vojsko, aby vyhubilo sicílske katolícke zhromaždenie, cítil som, že vlastnými rukami mlátim naivné masy, ktoré do impotencie vkusu mojej ženskej známosti vhalucinovali mravnú skromnosť. Nech už som tento vyššie uvedený príbeh vymyslel akokoľvek vedome, v rovine každodenného života to vedomie predsa len nefungovalo, lebo pred ním stálo torzo so slnečnicami, ktoré celkom pretvorilo rytmus môjho vedomia: slnečnica bola iniciálou, ktorá vykonávala hygienickú prácu znepravdepodobňovania, transponovala vedomie do ľahkovážno-úzkostlivejšej roviny.

Zostávalo ešte „vypracovanie“ môjho príbehu. Odkiaľ mám začať? Príbeh, ako som ho tu opísal, sa v mojom mozgu nezrodil ako skica románu, ktorá má byť vypracovaná neskôr, ale bola to samostatná, hotová vec podobne ako slnečnicový znak, ktorý jej predchádzal, s tým rozdielom, že som sa do toho vedome silil. Ale cieľom všetkého môjho snaženia bolo len to, aby som vliat svoj hnev voči dievčaťu do určitej štruktúry, lineárneho vzorca: keď som vzorec našiel, vec ma viac nezaujímal a púšťať sa do „vypracovávaní“ nejakého dejového vzorca by bol absurdný nápad. Algebrickú formulu vyjadrujúcu fyzikálny zákon nemožno rozšíriť do epiky: a práve toto bolo podstatnou črtou témy vyššie spomínaného deja, to, že podľa svojej povahy nebola epická, nemala rozprávačské ciele, ale bola hotovou, uzavretou rovnicou. U mňa téma a vypracovanie nikdy nesúviseli: mal som témy, ktoré navždy zostali témami a nedali sa „vypracovať“, takisto ako ani zo zmršťujúcej sa gulky ortuti sa nedá vybudovať alebo „vypracovať“ ortuťový čínsky múr: skica sa nikdy nevzťahuje na neskoršie vypracovanie, každá skica je samoúčelná a nerozvíjateľná.

Aj „téma“ je iný žáner, aj „román“ je iný žáner a tieto dve veci nemajú nič spoločné: medzi tými, ktorí píšu témy, a tými, ktorí píšu romány, nemožno nájsť ani ten najvzdialenejší príbuzenský vzťah. Téma, ktorá nesmeruje k románu, znamená čistú kompozíciu a v mojich „vypracovaniach“

(ktoré sa, pravdaže, nezakladajú na nijakej „tému“) sa vyskytli „témy“ ako plánované kompozície; tieto kompozície však neznamenal konštrukciu diela, celého diela, ale „konštrukčné“ kapitoly vsadené do románu ako medzihry, čiže ak som napísal dve scény (bez „tému“) a potom mi v mysli skrsol nejaký výstavbový trik, kompozičná možnosť, namiesto toho, aby som tým trikom obe scény konštrukčne zjednotil, použil som „konštrukciu“ ako novú, tretiu scénu za už hotovými dvoma scénami. Takzvaná umelecká konštrukcia netvorila kostru románu, stmelujúci systém traverz, ale bola samostatnou postavou, ako keby sa dejová línia *Rómea a Júlie* stala jednou z aktívnych postáv tejže tragédie. Takto sa samo vypracovanie stane nekonečným, bude sa večne rozvíjať, neprestajne meniť svoju podobu, pojme do seba všetko a kedykoľvek môže všetko stratiť, no nad večnými perejami tohto kontinua vypracovania sa bude konštrukcia povýšená na osobitnú postavu vznášať ako dajaká korková ornamentika: ako keby som bielu ľaliu (ktorú som pomocou kaktusu a bielej ihlice do klobúka prv vedel vyjadriť precíznejšie ako ňou samou) náhle zbavil jej kontúr a získal tak iba nekonečne sa rozplývajúcu a zmršťujúcu sa, blúdivú bielu riekku, na ktorú však vrhnem osamostatnený čipkovitý vzor kontúry. (Maliarstvo túto techniku aplikuje už hodne dlho.)

Čo som teda mal robiť? Mal som v rukách dve veci: automaticky sa naskytajúci slnečnicový vrak, ktorého skromnosť a vizuálnu obmedzenosť vyvažovalo, že sa mi vo vedomí vynoril s biologickou prirodzenosťou, čiže mi umožňoval pozorovať tajný štýl prírody. Tou druhou vecou bola „téma“, matematický výtvar vedomej abstrakcie, ktorý nikam ďalej nevedol. Nemohol som začať opisom Benátok alebo jednou z obžalobných rečí kniežaťa, pretože Benátky boli len algebrickým uzlom, reč kniežaťa iba znamením v operácii, nič viac: tento dej neznamená nič, v ňom vystupujúce slová ako Benátky, knieža, Semita, luterovec alebo pápež nemali pojmovú oblasť: pojmov sa iba dotýkali a hneď ich aj opúšťali, inak by sa nevedeli stať konštrukciou: konštrukcia totiž vylučuje „zmysel“.

Nezostáva iné ako hľadať tretí stupienok, čiže taký obraz (teraz už skutočnú „scénu“, nie odmocninu metafory, akou boli základy slnečnice), v ktorom sa môžem slobodne pohybovať: kde obrazové prvky sú labilné a na spôsob nepravidelnej vody či omamného vetra sa medzi nimi vznášajú čulé vlny času a priestoru zmývajúce a odvíjajúce drsné hrany konečného zmyslu, ktorý sa zavše prejavuje na zovňajšku predmetov. Do tohto slobodného obrazu treba potom prečerpať „tému“, ktorá sa úplne premenená, rozbitá na atómy alebo v podobe väčších segmentov bude vznášať v novom a cudzom obraze ako opráchnutý žltý gaštanový list na hladine ďalekého jazera. A „téma“ sa ani nemôže ocitnúť v šťastnejšej situácii, než je oscilácia podobná listu, súbežná s neorganickým pohyblivým obrazom.

Kým slnečnicový vzor a tematické línie charakterizovala ťaživá statika, zatiaľ onen tretí obraz (ktorý hneď uvediem) spásonosná otvorenosť. Otvorenosť, nie pohyb, tak ako aj tiché, ale malé jazero znamená nekonečnú otvorenosť: čierne zrkadlo úprimnosti. Úprimnosť jazier nie je morálne gesto, ale optický šmrnc nekonečna: čím dlhšie naň hľadím, tým viac ma približuje k akejsi latentnej vrstve, čoraz precíznejšie vyjadruje vrstvu pod vrstvou; je ako svištiaca olovená guľa, ktorá sa vnára stále hlbšie a hlbšie: vo fyzike sa tomu možno hovorí pohyb, no z duševného hľadiska veľké horizontálne smilstvo jazera znamená, že nahý život priestoru možno obnažovať večne, obnažovať večne ďalej; každá otvorenosť môže byť ešte o stupeň otvorenejšia: to je sadistická sugescia tichých záhradných jazier.

Prvá vlastnosť, ktorú v *Schéme začiatku* vnímam pri obraze na treťom stupni, je práve otvorenosť, v ktorej sa dá večne pokračovať: ak nakreslím kruh, tak po 360. stupni dosiahnem východiskový bod a môžem najviac ak zosilniť čiaru už nakresleného kruhu, no ak predsa len krúžim kružidlom ďalej – otvorenosť tichých jazier a otvorenosť obrazu aplikovaného v tretej fáze spočívali práve v tom, že keď som ho už raz „úplne“ otvoril (čiže jeho úprimnosť sa dostala na stupeň typický pre vyvrátenú rukavicu: otvorenosť

obrazu nemeríme v stupňoch, ale jednotkou úplne vyvrátenej rukavice), v prípade, že by som ho otváral ďalej, nebudem sa už nachádzať na mieste, čiže otvárať ho na mieste, ale po 360° príde 361°, 420° až po nekonečný reálny stupeň otvorenosti: podstata otvorenosti tkvie v tom, že sa v nej zjednocujú vlastnosti kruhu a nekonečne úzkej špirály, veď špirály si možno predstavovať ako 361-stupňové alebo 420-stupňové kružnice a tak ďalej až do nekonečna. *Apertura sempiterna additiva*: také niečo možno názorne predviesť a vysvetliť len pohybom, no v skutočnosti to v žiadnom prípade pohyb nie je. Oproti sebe stoja uzavretosť a otvorenosť, nie státie a pohyb.

Na troch miestach *Schémy začiatku* prebiehajú dve protismerné stupňovania: pokiaľ ide o látku románu, tá sa vždy zužuje, a pokiaľ ide o siderické pole románu, to sa postupne rozširuje. Z materiálneho hľadiska najprv vznikla skica slnečníc, potom téma, nakoniec obraz, napríklad v tomto prípade (ako to hneď uvidíme) stavba lode v Benátkach. Pri prvom pohľade nemá človek dojem, že ide o postupné zužovanie látky, ale keď sa trom etapám „látky“ prizrieme zblízka, ako anglickí obchodníci s porcelánom, keď v Číne kupujú kanvice, vázy, kvetináče a taniere a pýtajú sa, čo je malba, čo je smalt, čo je vsadené a čo vypálené, či je červen dosiahnutá pridaným farbivom alebo bola vytavená z matérie atď., a podľa toho hodnotia starú keramiku, tak i my môžeme zakúsiť, že najmateriálnejší bol ten mimovoľný slnečnicový flip, v porovnaní s ktorým je téma už oveľa redšia, ak nie priam falošnejšia látka, kým na obraze rozostavanej lode sa neprejavuje už nič materiálne: celé to je jeden obrovský reflex. Naproti tomu (a dôsledkom toho) slnečnica, napriek svojej fragmentárnej podstate, z ktorej sa šklábí absencia, vstrebala do seba všetok priestor ako rybička, ktorá pohlce všetku vodnú flóru vo svojom revíre, nafúkne sa a praskne; téma, ktorá už aj z materiálneho hľadiska je ešte biednejšia a užšia ako ukážka slnečnice, ponechala okolo seba viac priestoru ako čaj, keď nechá časť cukru nerozpustenú, a nakoniec stavba lode poslúžila asi ako dvere, úplne rozdrvené absolútnym pokračovaním otvorenosti a

zredukovaným aktom priestoru (perpetuum nudile). Takže ktorý obraz v schéme začiatku môjho románu namiereného proti skúpej a „diskrétne sa odievajúcej“ dievčine predstavoval tretí stupeň?

Obrovský blok rozostavanej lode za zimného večera v Benátkach, v úzkom doku lagúny (na takýchto miestach lode pravdepodobne ešte nikdy nestavali): čierny železný tuleň je vyšší ako okolité domy. Na jednom boku lode sa skvie veľký, ako tráva zelený flák, Mesiace. V tejto časti sú tieňové také ostré, že svojimi parazitujúcimi koreňmi vrastajú do trupu lode, každé kníšu sa lano, povrazové stúpadlo, rebrík, zabudnutý trám, provizórny most alebo podporné brvno sa vyskytujú dvakrát, ako v slovníku, kde ten istý význam figuruje vo dvoch jazykoch: v tieňovčine a mesačnosvitčine.

Vzduch je teplý, no riedky a padajú veľké vločky snehu: voda okolo lode, meravá ako smolná čepel', sa napína tak ticho, že snehové vločky zostávajú presne na tých miestach, kam práve dopadli: chvíľu ich ešte vidno na hladine, na okamih sa ešte väčšmi zabelejú, zažiaria ako iskry, aby sa vzápätí roztopili: topeniu predchádza akýsi milý geometrický odpor – kým sa vo vzduchu pohojdávali ako miniatúrne a zelené parochne, boli len chumáčiky, ale keď sa svojimi pichľavými hviezdovitými vetvičkami dotknú vody ako baletky na sklenom javisku, zrazu sa vyčíria do pravidelných hviezd, ľadových asteriskovitých iskier, aby po nich v lenivom tele vody zostali len čierne pupky presne tam, kde ich pohltila noc, lačná po skle.

Snehové vločky kreslia na staropanenské, zvráskavené priečelia domov také body, aké vidno (zakrúžkované ceruzkou) na sadrových sochách, myslím si, že sú potrebné pri tesianí do mramoru alebo pri odlievaní, nemám ani potuchy, pri čom. Domy sa povalujú vedľa zeleného a vydutého pohára neba ako zvyšok peny rozliaty na stole vedľa prevrhnutého zeleného krčaha; ani nie mesiac je v splne, ale nebo, noc plná jarných svetiel, sledovať ju možno len do niekoľkých schodov od hladiny vody: za tým je už len zelený vietor, jarný rozpuk vody, ostentatívny falošný peniaz mesiaca a veľké danaeovské

centenárium snehu.

Oblaky sa horizontálne kopia v snehobielych spórach, kým svetlozelený kužeľ nebeskej klenby zavrtáva svoj nos do neznámeho cieľa diaľok: celý ligotavý atlas je uháňajúci propeler alebo fúga vývrtky. Harlekýnska architektúra oblakov vyvažuje žiarivý a priesvitný trysk nebeskej klenby nad nimi ako vertikála sťažňa horizontálu zráňanej peny vznikajúcej za propelerom.

Okolo lode panuje hrobové ticho. Z vody sa týči obrovská kormidlová plutva: ufúľaný boh smeru. Keď človek takto osobitne vidí stelesnenie „smeru“, nevdojak pomyslí na nesprávny smer: ako keby sa celá morálka zakladala na tom, aby sme to, čo je znefunkčnené, mimovoľne vnímali ako zlo. O tejto obrovskej kormidlovej plutve sa nedalo predpokladať nič dobré, len zlé: bola ako krídlo okna, ktoré zabudli zatvoriť a ktoré namiesto zo skla vyrobili z tieňa, časť okna, za ktorým prebýva tá najškodoradostnejšia intencia. Inak pôsobila táto mŕtvicou zasiiahnutá kulisa smeru tu, nad vodou, tak obrovsky a bezmocne, až bolo nepredstaviteľné, že by sa dala nájsť paralela medzi veľkou luciferskou plutvou a miniatúrnym kompasom, ktorý chúlостivo a afektovane šušle svetové strany: kompas ukazoval príliš precízny, kormidlová plutva príliš kalibanský smer: ako sa napriek tomu dokázal tento obrovský žraločí donjon pohybovať? Popri tom, že kormidlová plutva zdanlivo znamenala zlý smer, bola tiež kacírom smeru: veci vyňaté zo svojej funkcie označujú nielen zlú funkciu, ale zakaždým aj tézu, podľa ktorej je dotyčná funkcia iba sofizmus, nejestvuje, namiesto nej je niečo iné: namiesto vyumelkovanej sofistiky cieľa existuje samoučelnosť vyňatého nástroja. Kormidlová plutva znamenala popri svojej nemravnosti aj akúsi bahennú ataraxiu, ktorá sa okrem seba nemôže starať o nič iné: jej krivosť sa vyznačovala dávkou vyzývavej bezsmerovosti, zodiakálneho vzdoru (ako ani krídla okna, ktoré rozcapil vietor, neukazujú nijakým smerom, iba ak k súkromne zameraným dimenziám šialenstva), spáreného s určitým

podmanivým starčekovským pokojom. Jej spodok zarastal machom a akousi vodnou rastlinou, tak ako náhrobné kamene v biedermeierovskom slohu zvykol obrastať trúchlivý pupenec: bahno, pruhované blato, prvotriedny vodný plyš a štipce koreňov sivasto svietili v spodnejšej, redšej a lacnejšej vrstve mesačného svitu. Obrovská plutva bola ku korme pripevnená temer len v jednom bode, takže pripomínala kolosálne ušné neceséry, ktoré visia vyžlám z lebiiek tiež iba na jedinom chlípku.

Celá loď bola neohrabaný klimatický Jánus: jej bok hlásal všetku krásu snežno-mesačnej jasnej jari a jej zadná časť (pravdepodobne dôsledkom ostrej intrigy obrovského krájača smeru) sa medzi handrami drobných pomocných člnov snažila udržiavať anachronický svet hmly, stuchnutého oleja, plesnivých tieňov a hrdzavých hlienov.

Inak, tento obraz sa vyžíval vo všakovakých anachronických črtách: jarné teplo a valiaci sa sneh, nočná tma a denný jas, stredovekí matrózi a moderný parník: ako keby sa pomocou týchto črt mohol uskutočniť cieľ väčšmi rozšíriť, väčšmi prevzdušniť krajinu.

Na konci lagúny, tam, kde ústi do širokého kanálu, bolo vidno žltý mostík: šikmý, posunutý, labilný most, pri ktorom človeku nenapadlo, že môže mať aj praktický zmysel, dal sa však chápať ako nejaký doplnok, náprotivok obrovskej lode, ako ďalšia forma vznášania sa nad vodou: aj loď, aj most boli vyrobené z ťažkopádnej, neohrabanej a lenivej hmoty, loď zo železných platní pozopínaných na lemoch ako reverenda, most z kameňov natisnutých na seba na spôsob vejára a disponujúcich len miestnym významom, a predsa to čierne lososie mauzóleum a ten citrónovožltý parabolický guignol zobrazovali vzlet oveľa úplnejšie než nejaká páperovo ľahučká gondola alebo čajka križujúca vodu.

Žltý rozheganý most bol najsvetlejším bodom noci, svetlejšim ako bok lode prežiarovaný mesačnou farbou: za ním hluché vrúbenie čiernych domov, pod ním čierny sekret vodného pôdorysu, ktorý osamelé telo Benátok

vylučuje s mihotavou hojnosťou. Ktorý z nich premáha vodu krajšie: veľká reparovaná ryba alebo tento násilný, barokovými reliéfmi hrdúsený sotvamost: jedna sa ponára do čiernej „secretio venetica“ s archimedovským bontónom, a tak nad ňou triumfuje, druhý zas v liturgickom ornáte z kameňa predvádza nad malinkým kúskom vzdialenosti nemožné gymnastické cvičenie, akrobaciu a povrazolezectvo.

Tento ťažký mostík určite postavili tak, že naprieč lagúnou vztýčili hrubý múr, hrádzu, a keď bola hutná hradba hotová, vyrazili v jej strede malú dieru, ako keby vývrtkou zvanou baranidlo vytlačili zaseknutý štupeľ: toto je druhá krajnosť budovania mostov. (Mosty sa totiž stavajú aj tak, že ponad rieku vystrelia do vzduchu dlhú cestu a z nej v dlhých kvapkách odkvapkáva zriedený rad neskorších pilierov.) Pravdaže, krása tohto žltého mostíka (pontifex minimus fecit) spočíva hlavne v tom, že ani jediná jeho čiastočka neobsahuje vzostup, švih, skok alebo vzlet, každý jeho stĺp, soška a ozdoba hlása nedbanlivú statiku suchozemského umenia, a predsa sa mu podarilo pretrvať vo vzduchu a úplne uvoľnená, neviazaná voda, čo sa pod ním vlní, ani netuší, akej náhode môže vďačiť za to, že sa vie dostať von, do ústredného kanála svojich túžob.

Takže toto bol tretí stupeň v *Schéme začiatku*: otvorená krajina (Pandora Canaletti, Linné). Na tomto trojstupňovom vývoji sú nápadné dve veci: jedna je to, že prvý biologický metaforový odpad a posledné široké tablo predstavujú dve symetrické krajnosti; druhú zas tvorí radikálna nesúvislosť troch stupňov, ich obsahová cudzota, ktorú však predsa len vnímam ako logickú príbuznosť, ba práve preto, že obrazová zložka týchto troch stupňov je taká nesúvislá, pociťujem tento vzťah ako racionálny.

Pozrime sa najprv na to, v čom spočíva krajnosť prvého a posledného vizuálneho štádia: prvé mi vytrysklo z mozgu automaticky, posledné som

hľadal vedome. Automatizmus prvého znamená, že jednu životnú udalosť, v danom prípade začiatok teórie románu, spárenú s hnevom proti skúpej, pseudoaristokraticky sa odievajúcej dievčine, takú udalosť moja duša alebo telo náhle prevráti na vnútornú záležitosť: ako mi vonkajší záchvev vzduchu vylúdi v duši čisté cis alebo f, tak mi aj vonkajšia udalosť vyvolá v duši slnečnicový útržok, naznačujúc, že udalosť, vonkajší príbeh sa náhle stal časťou mojej anatómie: pravdaže, pri príklade so zvukom okamžite dostanem cis alebo f, kým pri vnímaní udalosti, keďže tu je „podnet“ omnoho rozvetvenejší, spracúvanie prebieha po detailoch – slnečnica nie je nič iné ako dočasné znamenie vzťahujúce sa na to, že príbehový podnet sa presunul na estetickú vnútornú rovinu: premenil sa na anatómiu a má sa s ním zaobchádzať ako s estetickým príznakom.

Fragment slnečníc teda presne a s absolútnou úspornosťou predstavuje len premenu udalosti na moje telo alebo jej prechod do môjho tela: to malinké, ale podstatné plus, že k vonkajšiemu príbehu sa zrazu pripojilo vedomie, biologicky reagujúca oblasť, vlastne len iskrivý výboj medzi najspodnejšími, nevedomými vrstvami príbehu a estetizujúcou dušou. V tejto chvíli ešte moja vôľa nehrá žiadnu rolu: prvú subjektívnu úpravu príbehu vykonávajú najspodnejšie reflexné pohyby môjho inštinktu, ako keby sochu z piesku zrazu objala vodná vlna alebo ako keby mimózu tenkú ako vlas náhle uchvátila veterná smršť: prvá zmena sochy z piesku, prvá zovňajšková zmena mimózy má povahu reflexu, bude to naskrze determinovaná, bezmocná a fátumovitá premena, takzvaná „slepá“ sila pracuje osamelo. Ako prudký vietor bezvládnú mimózu, tak uchvacuje najspodnejšia biologická vrstva mojej osobnosti vonkajšiu udalosť a okamžite produkuje prvú slnečnicovú metamorfózu.

Toto všetko znamená, že román alebo myšlienka, ktorú spustila vonkajšia udalosť, je na tomto stupni v dusivo tesnom spojení s biologickým usporiadaním môjho individua: román na mne leží ako mokrý hodvábný

papier, ktorý pritisli na bronzovú sochu, jeho hmota je síce samostatná, no bez odchýlky kopíruje konštrukciu môjho ja: román-otrok, logika zajatca.

Touqué si jasne uvedomoval, že zdôraznenie biologického charakteru slnečnice vyjadril silne tautologickým spôsobom, no nazdával sa, že protielikom tautológie nie je skratka, zhutnenie a výpustka, ale nastavenie osobitného „oscilátora“, oscilátora totožnosti, čo v predmetnej štúdii spočívalo v tom, že ako prílohu použil aj obrázky slnečníc, vlčích makov a hortenzií zo zvláštneho vydania anglického časopisu *The Studio* venovaného záhradám a na fotografie šikmo vytlačil dialóg, ranné táranie dvoch anglických žien o svojich záhradách. Dve krajnosti, čiže „nekonečná definícia“ a „nekonečné hocičo“, musia sa raz ocitnúť vedľa seba: pravda sa vždy chce obklopovať stále pozitívnejšími prstencami, upadá však do tej osudnej roztržitosti, že si nevšíma, že definícia ultry neukladá okolo témy (v danom prípade biologický charakter slnečnice) koncentrické kruhy, ale kreslí špirálu, ktorá môže večne pokračovať, čiže z hľadiska každodennosti sa javí ako zúženie precíznosti, veď vďaka svojej večnej podstate je jej dráha všade rovnako otvorená, uvoľnená a impotentná. Ale Touqué si chcel odskúšať školácke delírium zmnožovania slov a chcel tiež hodnú chvíľu odvíjať aj fenomenologickú otvorenú špirálovú cievku sebaopakovania, cítil totiž, že hoci v racionálnej rovine prvého stupňa je toto len prešľapovanie na mieste, v racionálnej rovine druhého alebo n-tého stupňa sa aj tautológia dá použiť ako logická masa.

„Pravda“ totiž vždy pozostáva z dvoch prvkov – jedným je večná špirála okolo témy, milión hustých okov, pričom každá prechádza do ďalšej, takže téma, ktorá má byť definovaná, pretrváva za okovami len v zajatí humbugu (toto je najmä nemecká technika: heideggerovský stereotyp „otvorenej totožnosti“); tým druhým je oscilátor, ktorý túto večnú špirálu trhá, reže, odkláňa, popiera a zrádza (s istou unáhlenou nesvedomitosťou, skôr len pre poriadok, na základe baconovského esejistického štýlu by sa táto

metóda dala nazvať anglickou technikou: stereotyp „hravého kmitania rolí“). Pravda má teda dva prvky, ktoré predstavujú dva nezlučiteľné smery: pravda sa nikdy nedá „uzavrieť“, „definíciu“ i „oscilátor“ možno nanajvýš donekonečna hnať protichodnými smermi: na jednej strane do mýticky dusivej tautológie a na druhej strane do dusného, anarchistického mihotu. Lepší oscilátor ako bezcieľny rozhovor ani nemožno nájsť.

„... včera večer som počula akýsi veľký buchot či škripot, neviem si predstaviť, čo to bolo, hádam si len nenarazila autom do plotu?“ „No, to sa mi teda podarilo: vieš, že u nás opravujú plot, takže je kompletne rozobratý, nemáme ani bránu, takže sme okolo záhrady zorganizovali špeciálnu stráž. Keď idem autom, vchádzam dnu zozadu, lebo tam ešte máme malé, pomerne zachované drevené vráta...“ „Až takto ľpieš na bránach? Brána je dôležitejšia ako cesta vedúca do garáže?“ „Aj ty sa tomu smeješ, však, všetci sa mi vysmievajú, keď im to hovorím, ale ver mi, zmocňuje sa ma doslova strach z priestoru a morská nemoc, keď do garáže vchádzam cez miesto bez plotu.“ „No tak čo sa večer stalo?“ „Náš starý záhradník odložil všetky vedrá so slnečnicami, ktoré stáli pri zbúranom plote, dozadu k malým vrátam, lebo netušil, že keď je záhrada bez plotu, ja ju celú obídem, aby som sa do garáže dostala presne cez tú drevenú dieru.“ „A ty si pravdaže narazila?“ „A ešte ako! A pritom to boli celkom mimoriadne slnečnice, s obrovskými semiačkami a s obrovskými lupeňmi.“ „Nechápem, aj som si kúpila z tých semien a nič z nich nevyrástlo.“ „Tvoj záhradník sa v tom možno nevyzná. Prečo si sa nespýtala môjho?“ „Toho sa opýtať? Nevľúdnejšieho muftiho si ani nemožno predstaviť. Neuveriteľné, aby niekto, kto sa stará o tolko nádherných kvetov, bol taký hrubý a odporný. Hneváš sa?“ „Ale čo by som sa hnevala, on je taký len navonok, keď sa s ním rozprávaš dlhšie, premení sa na zlatého macka, zbožňujem ho.“ „Nemôžem vystáť ľudí, s ktorými treba polhodinu experimentovať ako s nejakou skladačkou a až potom povýšenecky začnú byť milí. Autu sa nestalo

nič? Lebo ty si, ako vidím, v poriadku..." „Ďakujem, z blatníka ostali len franforce, ako keď sa zo šampanského strhne staniol, naproti tomu som sa však dnes ráno dobre zabávala pri pohľade z okna spálne." „Na čom?" „Zrazu len počujem hlas môjho muža, ako sa s kýmsi háda v záhrade, vstanem, podídem k oknu a vidím ho, ako medzi prekotenými vedrami so slnečnicami spolu s jedným predákom skúma všelijaké úlomky. Zavolala som naňho, čo to je, či som nebodaj včera v noci nezvalila aj nejakú kamennú amforu alebo novopostavený, čerstvý múr, keďže som chcela byť čosi ako biblické auto, ktoré sa do garáže vie dostať výlučne len okom ihly? Môj muž mi plačlivým hlasom zakričal, kdeže, nerozbila som vázu, stalo sa niečo oveľa horšie: zbúrala som práve budovanú kompozíciu ruiny." „Nebesá, to je veľmi zábavné: zbúrať ruinu." „Našťastie súčasti ruiny boli označené veľkými maľovanými číslami, takže ich vedeli znovu zostaviť do pôvodného neporiadku, ktorý plánovali celé týždne. Ale som sa nasmiala!" „Povedz, slnečnice naozaj vždy obracajú svoju tvár k slnku? Podľa mňa nemajú so slnkom nič spoločné." „Aká si poctivá, že aj na toto myslíš, mne také čosi nikdy nezíde na um. Inak, príď k nám na olovrant, budeme ich spolu pozorovať z terasy, či sa naozaj obracajú za zapadajúcim slnkom." „Dnes nemôžem, lebo si skúšam župan. Predstav si, že moja krajčírka urobí večerné šaty po dvoch skúškach, ale na župan ich potrebuje hádam aj šesť." „Vieš čo, tak ja prídem k tebe pozrieť si tvoje veci. Môj muž župany neznáša, takže si nikdy žiadny nedám ušit: hovorí, že nevie vystáť, keď po jazdení alebo tenise príde domov na raňajky v bielej košeli a v bielych nohaviciach plný čerstvého vzduchu a chuti cvičiť a doma ho pri čaji víta do hodvábu zababušená ospalá švindľgejša." „Zaujímavé, aj môj muž povedal čosi také, že župan človeka mrzačí: s rukávmi prišitými ku kolenám, so sukňou pripnutou k lopatkám sa zo ženy stáva akási hrbatá japonská príšera, hlavne, že vzor zostáva nedotknutý." „Veď to, veď to, presne to. Do mojej výbavy totiž okrem iného patril aj župan, ktorého strih bol kostrbatý, vyzeral ako nepodarená bandáž na rane pokrývajúcej celé telo, no na nekonečne plantavom pravom rukáve a v drieku bola vyšitá jediná obrovská

slnečníca...“ „Apropo! Apropo!“ „Áno, áno. Na to, aby bolo slnečnicu ľahko a jasne vidieť, musela som vykonávať všelijaké groteskné pohyby a to môj manžel neznášal.“ „Ja mám obrovské vzory veľmi rada, ba na jednom zo županov bude vzor väčší ako sám župan.“ „Ako to?“ „Na chrbát sa zmestí len polovica vzoru, druhá polovica bude k županu pripevnená v podobe akejsi vystuženej platne ako nejaké krídlo anjela či stuartovská plutva.“ „Ty počuj, toto je ešte stále tá žena, ktorú si splašila počas našej letnej dovolenky?“ „Tá, tá.“ „Ale veď vtedy si od rána do večera ochkala, aká je nedochvilná.“ „Aj teraz ochkám, lenže je veľmi šikovní. Obzvlášť v poslednom čase sa mi tie ceremónie so skúšaním šiat bridia. Inak teraz sem chodí pomerne často, ak aj len nazrie, príde aj trikrát, ale nerozčuluje ma, že sa ohlasuje presne v tie dni, na ktorých sme sa nedohodli. Nechodievam preč, stále som doma.“ Atď., atď.

Takýmto spôsobom funguje po tautológii oscilátor.

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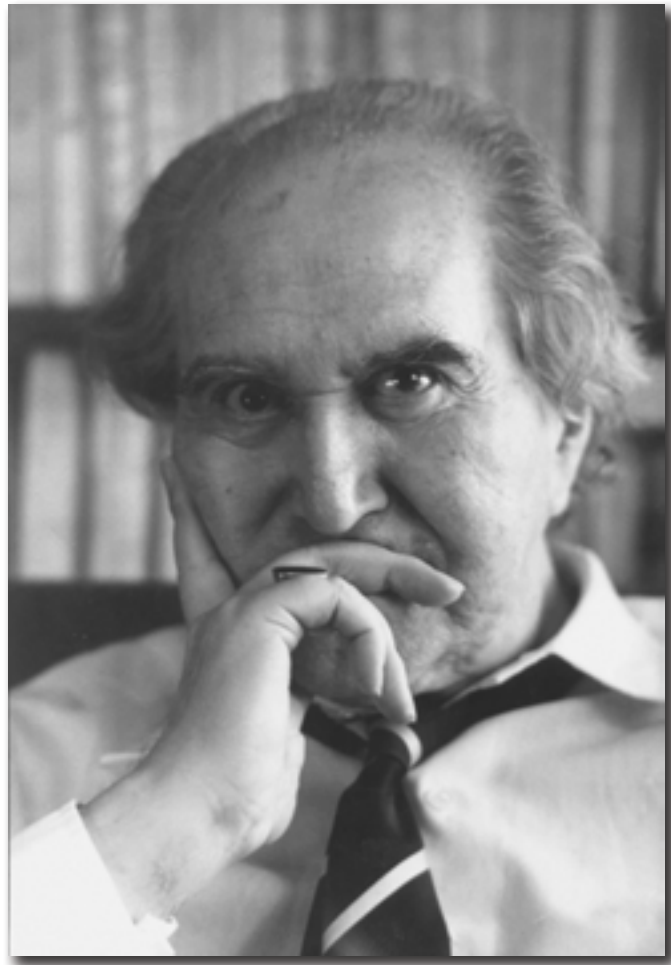
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On the future of aesthetics

Behind the Mask and Under the Surface: On *Divertimento*, Miklós Szentkuthy's Mozart Novel



Tibor Pintér

Between 1888 and 1891, Gustav Mahler was the musical director and first conductor at the Budapest Opera House. During that time, people who were habitually late for the performances irritated Mahler, which led to his merciless edict: nobody was permitted to enter into the auditorium or the balconies once the

music had begun. On one occasion, a prince of the royal Habsburg family was late and the staff of the Opera House did not allow him to enter the royal balcony. The event could have been a great scandal but the prince just had a short and soft question to his lieutenant: “Tell me my friend, is music really such a serious thing?”

The prince’s question also has bearing on the relationship between literature and music, composers and their biographies, or novels about their lives. These issues can be interesting, even fascinating — at least for those who think music is a serious thing... Carl Dahlhaus, the doyen of German musicology during the 20th century, raised questions about precisely such seriousness in his *The Idea of Absolute Music*:

The esthetics of music is not popular. Musicians suspect it of being abstract talk far removed from musical reality; the musical public fears philosophical reflections of the kind one ought to leave to the initiated, rather than plaguing one’s own mind with unnecessary philosophical difficulties.¹

However, Dahlhaus continues, if one believes that listening to music in an opera house without knowing the plot, without reading the libretto, could be one’s own personal decision, one is wrong. Such a decision is the result of an historical fact: music is an art for its own sake and every so called external element — such as poetry, dramaturgy, costumes, decoration — is alien to music itself, therefore such elements are not important to the listeners. The root of this notion can be found in the birth of the concept “absolute music.” Nowadays, it is perhaps common to listen to music “for its own sake,” which means that music is another world and the very ground of its existence, that it has the bewitching power to enable the listener to achieve transcendence. Every listener is like Brünnhilde captivated by the Fire ring and not wanting Siegfried to come to free her. The dichotomy of the two worlds is a real romantic myth in which the first world is our everyday realm; the other is the realm of art. Music has the special power to elevate us into that transcendental world. From this point of view, we are still the inheritors of

¹ Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, tr. Roger Lustig (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) 1.

Romanticism. This heritage appears in a special form, namely the biographical novel which — in its original form — is a purely Romantic narration on music, and above all on the great heroes of music — the life and work of the composers. In this essay I would like to give a description of Miklós Szentkuthy's most well-known novel about a composer: *Divertimento — Variations on the Life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*.

When a Hungarian reader searches for musical books in a second hand bookshop, or even in a library in Budapest, they are surprised that titles such as *Handel*, *Divertimento*, and *Doctor Haydn* by Miklós Szentkuthy are not in the fiction section but usually in the music section. This surprising situation does not arise from the shopkeepers' or even the librarians' unprofessionalism but rather from the fact that the first editions of Szentkuthy's novels were published by Editio Musica Budapest (Zeneműkiadó), a publishing house whose every book was on music. And, yes, indeed, Szentkuthy's novels about composers are books on music: they treat the life and works of Handel, Mozart, and Haydn. However, these novels are not musicological treatises of course, although they do incorporate much musicological knowledge. They are not standard biographies, and above all they are not *biographie romancée* (biographical novels). The biographical novel as a post-romantic or even pseudo-romantic genre was very popular in the 30s in Hungary, and in particular, works on Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert were in fashion. The narration in the biographical novel is based on real or spurious historical facts. The main aim of the genre was to represent the subject as a hero who could be very weak but whose weakness is overcome by the work, as in Schubert's case. Or the hero could be very strong and congenial to his work, as in Beethoven's case. This kind of narration permeated the musicological-biographical narration too. Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, reflecting on the connection between biography and music, says this about the reception of Beethoven:

It is obvious that the reception of Beethoven had the desire to see Beethoven's moral habit in his music and his music as an expression

of his moral habit. [...] The reception heard the *ethos* in Beethoven's music and this *ethos* was found in Beethoven's life. The reception wanted to understand Beethoven's music by the concepts of the suffering, will, and triumph. This was the origin in which the work and the self covered each other.²

This notion, *mutatis mutandis*, was valid for the biographical-novelistic narration on Beethoven and Mozart as well.³ Even such an authority as Alfred Einstein wrote in his monograph on Mozart that he "was only a guest in the world."⁴ What else is this but an echoed voice of the *biographie romancée*? The genre itself is different from the romantic prototypes of the historical-biographical novels. Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, and Walter Scott created self-projected worlds in their novels; they represented their historical fantasies about the previous centuries. *The Three Musketeers* for example is not based on historical facts but rather on Dumas' vision of the Richelieu era in France during the 17th century. Differently than such works, although the *biographie romancée* uses the writer's vision, it is woven into selected historical facts, creating therefore a blend of fact and fiction. The purpose of this blending is to entertain the reader and the main goal is not the representation of historical facts but rather the expression of the romantic self. The selection is based on the points of view of the contemporary reader: the fashioned portraits of the hero, the common ideas of the composers. Szentkuthy himself liked to name his artist biographies "biographical fantasies." This concept of fantasy is not limited to the elements of a composer's life. It is rather an attempt at creating a whole new world, which is included with the composers' life — fiction and non-fiction. If we want to understand his main goals it is useful to compare his

² Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, *Musik im Abendland. Prozesse und Stationen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Piper, 1992) 467.

³ Some English language examples on Beethoven: Jacques Brenner, *Nephew to the Emperor: A Novel Based on the Life of Beethoven* (Cleveland: World, 1959); Samuel Chotzinoff, *Eroica: A Novel Based on the Life of Ludwig van Beethoven* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1930); and Carl von Pidoll, *Eroica: A Novel about Beethoven* (New York: Vanguard, 1957). Some English language examples on Mozart: Bernard Grun, *The Golden Quill: A Novel Based on the Life of Mozart* (New York: Putnam, 1956); Charles Neider, *Mozart and the Archbody* (New York: Penguin, 1991); David Weiss, *Sacred and Profane: A Novel of the Life and Times of Mozart* (New York: Morrow, 1968); and David Weiss, *The Assassination of Mozart* (New York: Morrow, 1970).

⁴ Alfred Einstein, *Mozart: Sein Charakter - Sein Werk* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006) 332. First published in 1947.

notions on the biographical novel with the views of a contemporary writer. One of the most famous and yet nowadays also popular Hungarian musical *biographie romancée* is László Passuth's *The Musician of the Prince of Mantua*, written about Claudio Monteverdi, which was published in the same year as Szentkuthy's *Divertimento* (1957). It's possible that Passuth's work (and its popularity) was also the reason that Szentkuthy wrote very satirical comments about the *biographie romancée*. The genre itself he said "was a suspicious kind of the 'delightful teaching' and it would had been very difficult to point out that in this case the quality of the teaching or the quality of the delighting was weaker."⁵ Passuth's main aim was to represent an artist's life and his historical circumstances in a popular way. It meant for him that the reader could have an entertaining story on the composer's life. The narration is based on historical facts and Monteverdi becomes a quasi-romantic musical hero. Szentkuthy's point of view was totally different. For him this kind of narration was old fashioned and very cheap. A giant composer's life should not be the basis for a work of entertainment; not even if its aims would be pedagogical, namely aims which are incorporated in the expression 'delightful teaching.'

For Szentkuthy the mixture of fiction, non-fiction, and vision was based on an enormous, Gargantuan devouring of European cultural history. He read two to three books a day, studied many paintings, listened endlessly to music, and wrote his novels and his gigantic diary with a graphomaniacal furor.⁶ Among these activities he lived a complicated private life. His life was in the aesthetical stadium in the sense of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. Szentkuthy's main goal was to catch the moment with all of its parts: to catch the moment as a totality and to catch history as a moment. The main works of this baroque grandiosity are the novels of the *St. Orpheus Breviary* (1939-1984). When he could not continue to publish this series of novels because of the communist political era, he started his new program, which he would have published as a series under the title *Self-portrait in Masks*. These

⁵ Miklós Szentkuthy, *Utószó a Saturnus fiához* [Epilogue to *Son of Saturn*] (Budapest: Corvina, 1966) 421.

⁶ Szentkuthy concealed his diary for decades. The first part of it is being opened in July 2013, the next in 2038.

novels are his so called biographical novels: *Divertimento – Variations on the Life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (1957), *Doctor Haydn* (1959), *Face and Mask* [on Goethe (1962)], *Son of Saturn* [on Albrecht Dürer (1966)], and *Handel* (1967). Three of them are “biographies” of musicians. The earliest, *Divertimento*, was the first novel that Szentkuthy wrote on request. The above-mentioned musical publishing house had the idea to publish a new Hungarian novel for the celebration of the bicentenary of Mozart’s birth. The representatives of the publishing house might have had the idea to publish a *biographie romancée*. There was no political risk in this request: classical music was a featured art in the communist era, Mozart was regarded as a “politically advanced” artist, and the censorship board did not recognize Szentkuthy as a completely censored writer. Szentkuthy accepted the request but one could think at first glance that his doing so was only with bad grace. But it was a good opportunity for him to alter the already well-founded style of his *St. Orpheus Breviary*, although in more of a popular manner. Due to the difficulty of his style and his complex use of language, Szentkuthy’s novels never have been too popular in Hungary. But in wanting to be better known, he may have seen the figure of Mozart as a good opportunity for this goal too. Another factor that may have prompted his accepting the request was financial difficulties: in the 50s, Szentkuthy supported himself mainly through translations. Among other books he translated into Hungarian Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1952) and Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1955). So this request provided him with the opportunity to write a new original work.

The basic idea for the Mozart novel is really simple and splendid. A fictitious figure, an oboe player, Gotthold Engelbert Zederhaus (the name can be derived from the name of a small village in the Salzburg Province, Austria), who is relatively closely acquainted with Mozart, sends a bulk of written paper to a novelist named Johann Meyer (also a fictitious figure) in the winter of 1822. Meyer earlier published a letter in a musical periodical asking for letters, diary entries, and memoirs regarding the life of Mozart because he wanted to write a novel about him. Zederhaus-Szentkuthy’s memoir-novel is a “humble” contribution to Meyer’s

planned novel. With this frame, Szentkuthy creates a figure that is responsible for the entire Mozart portrait. The game with the found or sent or fictitious manuscripts is an old and well worked idea in European literature and philosophy: think for example of Kierkegaard's *Either Or* and Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. It has a secret, mystical sense; the reader feels that he / she is in the middle of a detective story. The date of the memoir is also relevant. The first part of the 19th century is the heyday of the romantic interpretation of Mozart's life and work. To show an example, E.T.A. Hoffmann, the famous German writer, composer, and conductor who took his second given name (Amadeus) out of admiration for the genius of Mozart, wrote these lines in 1813:

Mozart leads us into the realm of spirits, but, without pain, it is more of an anticipation of the infinite. Love and melancholy sound in lovely spirit voices; night arrives in a purple glow, and with unspeakable longing, we move towards them who wave at us to join their ranks and to fly with them through the clouds in their eternal dance of the spheres.⁷

However, Szentkuthy's decision that the narration occur in the early 19th century has a further consequence regarding the problem of the *biographie romancée*. The *biographie romancée* evokes the tone of romantic speech but in a popular style. The effect of this kind of speech on music was extremely new at the beginning of the 19th century, for example in the case of Hoffmann, but more than a century later it becomes with Arnold Hauser's expression a "submerged cultural good":

"Popular art" (...) is to be understood as artistic or quasi-artistic production for the demand of a half-educated public, generally urban and inclined to mass-behavior. [...] in the case of popular art, we find [...] an artistically uncreative, completely passive public, and professional production of artistic goods strictly in response to the demand for them.⁸

⁷ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Beethoven's Instrumental Music*, tr. by Ingrid Schwaegermann: http://www.raptusassociation.org/hoffmann_e.html

⁸ Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History* (New York: Knopf, 1958) pt. 5, ch. 1.

Originally, the “delightful teaching” was a leading concept of Renaissance literary criticism, and later of neoclassical French aesthetics. Its German consequence was the aesthetical theories of the *Bildungsbürgertum* (the well-educated bourgeoisie), essentially in Goethe’s and Schiller’s notions of art. But this notion can be found in its original shape in the aesthetics of antiquity of course. As Horace expressed it:

Who can blend usefulness and sweetness wins every
Vote, at once delighting and teaching the reader.⁹

The concept of “delighting and teaching” as the ideal of the *Bildungsbürgertum* itself becomes a “submerged cultural good” during the late 19th and 20th centuries. It was part of the communist cultural ideology, which in its roots preserved the ideals of the well-educated communist citizen, even the well-educated worker and peasant. But this political and ideological concept was empty in comparison to the original German neoclassical program. However, in Hungary’s strange cultural climate, the ideology of “delighting and teaching” was favored, and for this ideology a writer such as László Passuth was more faithful than Szentkuthy. It does not mean that Passuth would have been a servant of communist ideology but that, speaking severely, he was more fit for it.

Szentkuthy’s aim was totally different. First, he gathered all of the contemporary materials, such as the complete letters of the composer, the memoirs of his colleagues, family members, and the first biographies written on Mozart. Second, he studied all of the well-established modern musicological biographies of Mozart such as Otto Jahn’s and Alfred Einstein’s. And last but not least he exhaustively studied the *oeuvre*: on the one hand his enormous, ca. 15000 volume, private library contained full scores of Mozart’s operas, piano concertos, chamber music, symphonies, etc. Szentkuthy played the piano very well and he studied Mozart’s works at the piano, too. On the other hand, he had a vast collection of sound recordings, and he listened to performances of Mozart’s music frequently. All of these materials and research were used by Szentkuthy to serve his own

⁹ Horace: *Ars Poetica*, 343-344. Tr. by A.S. Kline:
<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceArsPoetica.htm>

notion of the *biographie romancée*. However, his main aim was to create a fantasy that is paradoxically more real than the documented life itself. This paradox was one of the most important parts of his *ars poetica*. Life, biography, even history itself is yet not real in its simple gathering of detailed events and facts. On the contrary: these elements totally transform all of the “original” events and facts. For Szentkuthy, every historical element was a mask that concealed the greater truth of existence. The so-called precise biography is only a surface, a collection of historical facts. The real existence of a human being and history itself is beyond the facts: the reality is a *Grand Guignol*.¹⁰ In this sense, Szentkuthy’s thinking was cyclical; he always created variations on history as a *Grand Guignol*. Every moment and every situation of history was a possibility for a series of variations providing multiple perspectives in order to get closer to the cyclical nature of history. In this sense, Szentkuthy’s view of life can be compared to that of a puppet master who is above the big games of history and whose movements create all the games of his world. And indeed, one can catch in this notion the proper sense of the expression: “self-portrait in masks.” This of course does not mean that Mozart’s life would become only a mask. But Szentkuthy does not describe a life. Rather, he uses the episodes of Mozart’s life to represent his views on human existence, the place of the artist in society, and history itself. Szentkuthy, who liked to act and to play different roles in his life, also liked to play endless historical *farces* even in his biographical fantasies.

In the case of Szentkuthy’s Mozart-fantasy, let us first consider the narrator, the hautboy player Zederhaus. He is in a relatively close relation to Mozart: he is an everyday musician who knows the hero well; nonetheless, he is not a good friend or a relative. The distance is well grounded: if he was actually a close friend of Mozart’s, Szentkuthy-Zederhaus could not speak freely about the composer, and *vice versa* if he was in a very distant relation to him — nobody could believe his words. The novel itself can be read as the fantasy of an eyewitness of Mozart’s life, and behind Zederhaus’ mask is the writer himself. But the reader

¹⁰ On the relationship between Szentkuthy’s prose writing and the theater (especially the *Grand Guignol*), see J. József Fekete, “Farce és haláltánc” [Farce and Death Dance], *Kortárs*, No. 9 (2002): <http://www.kortaronline.hu/2002/09/farce-es-halaltanc/9943>

slowly forgets that he / she is reading the memoir of Zederhaus. The narrator blends in with the endless variations of his own narration. But at certain points he appears again and again with accidental self-expressions only to disappear again and again. The outer elements of Mozart's life for example is based on real facts but the consequences of them are the game of the writer. With this technique, Szentkuthy plays a double game. First he creates a devoted eyewitness, then he gradually conceals him, then the author himself can come into sight from behind his mask. After this he can be behind the mask again.

"As you see I am not a hypocrite of the Mozart cult," — says Zederhaus-Szentkuthy at one point,¹¹ and his confession is very important regarding the narrator's and the author's portrait of Mozart. On the one hand, Zederhaus writes his memoirs in the middle of the heyday of the romantic Mozart cult and he clashes with the dominant *Biedermeier* sentimentalism: the vulgar sensation of the emotionalism of the so called *Gefühlsästhetik*. On the other hand, Szentkuthy writes his novel in the middle of the heyday of the pseudo-romanticism of the *biographie romancée*. The naïve emotionalism and the novelistic pseudo-romanticism have a common characteristic feature: hypocrisy. We know all of these clichés: the lonely artist with his suffering due to the misunderstanding of his work; the artist who looks into the secrets of the future; the artist who composes his works as confessions of his sufferings of private and public life. One can collect a complete list of these very well known clichés. The author and the reader have a common feeling: both of them think that they understand every element of the hero's life and work. They have a common complaint about the age and the public that did not understand the composer's inner life as well as they did. This is an aesthetic trap: the feeling of compassion proves right the ethical and aesthetic judgment.

To give a short portrait of the figure of Mozart in the novel, this is best served by citing some lines from the only critical text about that work of Szentkuthy's. András Pernye, the Hungarian musicologist, was the only person

¹¹ Miklós Szentkuthy, *Divertimento* (Budapest: Magvető, 1976) Vol. 1, 396.

who reviewed the novel. This fact is surprising but not strange. Hungarian literary circles did not pay attention to *Divertimento* because it was about music. And the Hungarian musicologists did the same because the text was not a factual biography but a “novel.” András Pernye pointed out that the mask and its endless variations is the central structural principle of the fantasy-novel. Everybody identifies him- / her-self in the game of “I am not I am.” There is no convention, no responsibility, and no ethical dimension to life. But the reality of life and history is in these masks: the “truth of the masks.” As András Pernye notes:

“At the beginning of the novel Mozart is a stranger in this environment. He is looking for the real faces with his childish sense of justice: the human being behind the clothes, the soul behind the harsh gestures. Mozart has to realize that behind the surface there is nothing. Everything and everybody exists only on the surface: masks and puppet marionettes are everywhere. This is the final truth of a theatrical world, the age of the rococo and the *ancien régime*. And finally Mozart puts on the irresponsible mask of endless smiling and he keeps an eye on the world from behind this mask: from above and from outside, like he would have a seat in a theatre and he would watch a bad play. [...] Szentkuthy has realized, recognized, and trustworthily portrayed a duality *à la Watteau*: the Janus face of the sad clown and the cheerfully laughing tragic hero. This is the final and most important key to Mozart’s art.”¹²

Szentkuthy needs endless descriptions to furnish the whole mask as if it were an enormous late Baroque building. He uses all of the human senses: there are meticulously described images, tastes, smells, sounds. All of these unite in an extremely sophisticated and aesthetically abundant text as if it would be, metaphorically, a late Baroque cathedral. The ornamental style of Szentkuthy’s prose writing has an essential importance. In the thinking of variations, the cyclical narrative ornaments become a possibly endless cycle of a musical variation. Deleuze uses the expression of the fold (*le pli*) to point out the importance of Baroque

¹² András Pernye, “Miklós Szentkuthy: *Divertimento*,” *A mítosz mítosza: in memoriam Szentkuthy Miklós* [The Myth of the Myth: in memoriam Miklós Szentkuthy], ed. Gyula Rugási (Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 2001) 89–90.

ornamentation, which is not an attribution but rather an inner substance of Baroque thinking.¹³ Szentkuthy has the same vision of the masque of the 18th century. Every descriptive element in the novel can be understood as a drapery that involves the endless folds of itself. Therefore, the series of the variations are for unfolding the mental image of the multiple possibilities of a life that is deeply rooted in the world and in the intellectual climate of its own age. Mozart is not a lonely, isolated figure in the novel; he is rooted in his every nerve in his world — yet he contemplates this world and he does not have a flattering image of it.

At this point we find a correlation between Szentkuthy's *ars poetica* and his portrait of Mozart defined as a "self-portrait in a mask." Similarly, Szentkuthy himself also saw history as a *Grand Guignol*. The masks undergo change during the centuries, the surfaces are in eternal transitions, but behind the masks and underneath the surfaces history and the *theatrum mundi* remain the same. Szentkuthy chose Mozart as a mask for the representation of this world concept. His decision was completely correct.

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¹³ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Discovering the Final Mask: On *Narcissus' Mirror* (Preamble for a Prae-version)

Péter Bálint



Nicholas Poussin, *Echo and Narcissus* (1630). Oil on canvas, 74 x 100. Louvre.

"When I 'confess,' I always interrogate, my whole body shies away to turn into a puzzle."¹

I.

Not long ago I received a postcard from Paris that had a painted wooden image showing a pyramid like staircase leading up and down, the steps corresponding to the various life stages of mankind, to the *degrés des âges*. On the stairs (marking the stages of earthly life from cradle to grave), surrounded by a barren and leafy tree, an allegoric male and female figure advance in their assigned time, being defined by celestial and earthly elements as well as by universal judgment. This postcard would not be worthy of interest if it did not somehow remind me of Szentkuthy who, as

¹ Miklós Szentkuthy, *Narcissusz tükre* (Budapest: Magvető, 1995) 150.

we know all too well, admired those art products that had a narcotic effect on his imagination, especially descriptions of the allegoric-mythical existence; in his prose works he repeatedly sketched his own “life tree,” where he presents solar and lunar types of human and mythical beings at those stages he assigned for them, and by this he is building his own “private mythology.”

When due to his good fate man arrives at the life stage that the Flemish painter named *âge de discretion*, having a certain amount of experience and readings behind him, he is not so unsuspecting as to know that things are fascinating and explicable/interpretable in themselves but always in relation to *other* things and experiences. I had the same thoughts in relation to the recently published Szentkuthy book entitled *Narcissus' Mirror*, which was written in his early twenties, in the *âge d'adolescence*, the period when teenagers stepping over the threshold of manhood are specifically susceptible to life and existence in general.

I have to admit that no matter how zealously I usually read and comment on Szentkuthy's works, I could not have brought myself to write notes on this early and fragmented text, if I were not inspired by the simultaneous rereading of *Narcissus' Mirror*, by the postcard enchanting me, and by the rereading of Gide's preface to Montaigne's work that together with some of its thoughts set my imagination on and encouraged me to formulate parallel thoughts. We cannot deny the outstanding similarity between the former essayist and Szentkuthy since they are both like bees “stealing all away from flowers then making honey out of them, a honey becoming completely their own” — just as Montaigne states analyzing his own writerly-philosophical nature.² Analyzing and investigating books of entire libraries and thousands of phenomena of existence, Montaigne and Szentkuthy interiorized these phenomenological objects to such a degree that we can hardly perceive their unique versions other than as they had described them. *Trompe d'oeil?* Trap? The writer catches our imagination and no longer releases us from this

² Although Nisard's *History of French Literature* is not very current it is still worth recalling (and it creates a basis for the parallels) for how Montaigne is characterized: “nothing was left unobserved, his thirst for knowledge was not scared away by hardships found in self-knowledge and self-judgment, neither by shame that he will catch himself committing mistakes. He is at the same time an observer and an actor in his own life. He follows it as an attentive spectator follows a play, giving a meticulous account of it being a man who amuses himself, ignoring the fact if the play mocks the audience or the audience likes the play or not.” In D. Nisard, *A francia irodalom története I–IV* (History of French Literature), tr. Károly Szász (Budapest: MTA Kiadó, 1878) I. 408.

captivity. In return, we let ourselves be enchanted: we have become the writer's accomplice.

However, would not Szentkuthy's all-analyzing eye start to brighten up when he read the following line by Montaigne: "I do not depict existence but transformation"? In all of Szentkuthy's works, in his diaries, novels, essays and fragments he revealed the mystery play taking place for thousands of years on the virtual double (or two raised to the power) stage of history: in the orgies of exaggerated passions and in the spirit shrinking below freezing point, in the formation and transformation of masks appearing in various scenes. The endlessly running writing style describing carnivalesque existence and the transformation of masked beings and their becoming another will exclude two genres. On the one hand, instead of the classical novel form it will create a *breviarium* type of work in which each chapter and each story and their masked protagonists as well as mythical references and philosophical commentaries supplement, tinge, strengthen or question each other. On the other hand, even though these plays presented on this "stage of history" representing any given period will not ever become a historical novel in the classical sense; in fact, Szentkuthy did not intend to write one. To define the historical novel is problematic anyhow; in his essay entitled "What is a Historical Novel?" André Daspre analyzes the relationship of writing history and writing a novel and he lists those pros and cons that make the rules of the genre questionable. Daspre cites Aristotle, according to whom poetry is more philosophical than novel writing; at other places he refers to Bayle, complaining about the intermingling of truth and fiction in novels so writers who are no longer young dare to give credit to what is credible; again in another place he cites Alain, according to whom writing history and novels interconnects events with each other, investigates characters, but they do not seek the same truth. Nor does Szentkuthy search for the historical truth but for the various qualities of existence in history, its numerous masked versions and the archetypes hiding behind them. He protested early against the research of his subject matter before looking at his writing style, first because he wished to describe the Protean quality and carnivalesque madness of existence — human history only served as a pretext for this task and just as in Montaigne's writings, it brought forth many doubts and questions. And would not

the one reading and querying Szentkuthy have been moved as if in a cradle on the “sea of secrets and deep unity” within the program created by these two minds, thinking disorderly and creating new forms of expression. Montaigne summarized it as follows: “is it necessary to take the mask off of things as well as of men?” And finally, is not it too daring to pass the same subjective judgment on Szentkuthy as Gide passed on the French moralist: “As likely or not, Montaigne is most surprising, at least for me, when sometimes unexpectedly and also unwillingly with his light flaring up he directs attention to the uncertain borders of personality and the changing nature of the I: perhaps this is when he speaks to us most directly?”³

II.

In many respects, specifying *Narcissus’ Mirror* as a prose fragment is appropriate. Not only because it was conceived in the impulse of writing the monumental *Prae* but because this early piece of writing left fragmented (and this becomes evident when one is familiar with the entire oeuvre, which has not been sealed and settled by the death of the author) is the primal source of numerous preexistent theories and subjects that in his later works, especially in the *St. Orpheus Breviary*, Szentkuthy unfolded in their entirety and complex system of correspondences. It is sufficient just to refer to a few repeatedly recurring subjects written from various viewpoints and from various aspects. An example may be the reviewing and listing of the emotional-physical contradictions of love and facing the impossibility of the redemption of love; narcissistic self-love (which is at the same time a distancing of the other person, who means hell and a protest against the fact of human personality) and the non-ethical testing of sin. Or the initiation of hiding behind masks and the obsessive self-chase into a practical everyday wisdom; transforming confessions into diaries on life being unbearable and the constant commentaries on a gigantic *catalogus rerum*; depicting carnivalesque life and homage to Venice, a city painted on many of the fine Italian art works also belong to these correspondences.

³ Michel Montaigne, *A tapasztalásról. André Gide esszéjével* (tr. Réz Ádám); André Gide, “Montaigne,” *The Yale Review* (March 1939).

And not last, the passionate psychological and mythological quest and investigation of the self-destruction of death-hetaeras possessing aspects from the underworld — interpreted as such by Kerényi — and the frenzy of intact virgins; the unveiling of bravado in the name of ideas and the dismantling of statements that appear unquestionable; the staging of history and the urge for creation in a room to which one can retreat.

Narcissus' Mirror seems to have a *prae* character in regards to its choice of masks and characters. Narcissus being the embodiment of self-love, self-pity, self-analysis, self-onania and selfishness (on the one hand the victim of moon goddesses from the underworld, on the other hand of the masked actors of Baroque mystery plays in the Spanish court) itself is a *prae* version of the mythic protagonist found later: Orpheus, behind whose mask he wrote his major work. The mask of Narcissus⁴ (chosen by Szentkuthy in his teenage years): the perpetual gaze into the mirror is the projection of the momentary and illusory fainting into the self-image, the Tantalic thirst for life and of becoming a man. However, this mask of his, which he put on in order to deepen his self-recognition,⁵ is not complex enough to animate the diversity of carnivalesque madness and the different existential qualities. As opposed to this, Orpheus (about whom in his text *While Reading Augustine* he already writes the following lines: "One can learn one thing from Clio what Saint Orpheus has learned well: she has a lyre in her hands. Lyre and not commentaries on the bottom of the page, not papyrus truth and a kind of impotent symbol of objectivity. History needs a muse and *lydische* or *dorische Tonart*: religion of the old, their homecoming, heroism and cheating, economy and imperium-corruption — all this is only lyric, only poetry, it is only beautiful and meaningful

⁴ "The mask appears reversed in the mirror, but the surprise is just the same, therefore it does not count anymore. The youth thinks he sees himself and he recognizes himself as one of the older men, fathers, masters, one that were leading and directing him so far, now however he is also one of them. A unifying transformation happens with the help of the mask as a father image: *Sileni patris imago*. The youth is unified with the fathers, he is initiated into becoming a man capable of procreation." Károly Kerényi, *Az égei ünnep* (The Heavenly Feast) (Budapest: Kráter Műhely Egyesület, 1995) 94.

⁵ "The ancient phenomena mentioned is mirroring, which can refer to man, the maker of the mirror, and may be defined as an ancient phenomena of self-recognition. [...] The mirror enriched the *bios*. Man enriched his own characteristic life to which his face belonged and just exactly by this, by his face. Without mirroring his own face would not be visible to men, it could only be seen by others." Kerényi: op. cit, 103.

in its epic mirror form.”⁶) with his many faceted psychological and mytho-poetic definiteness, with his variety manifesting many selves is the only and entire metaphor of fate in Szentkuthy’s oeuvre. He is at the same time a mortal being and a god, volatile and immortal, a Don Juan-type seducer and chastely innocent, a carnivalesque prince changing his masks and a cruel self-revealing confessor, a shipman never reaching the shore during his earthly and celestial rambling, as well as a self-made Renaissance man.

Characterizing *Narcissus’ Mirror* by calling it *prae* might be appropriate since Szentkuthy, with his writing style based on dualities, his eternal strain for definitions and categorizations, his pouring monologues and panel-like images, tries to experiment with and improve a specific style and genre form that he would be able to recognize as his own in his later writings. Wittgenstein writes in his book *On Certainty*: “we have learned the essence of counting while performing the act of counting.” Szentkuthy — who during the writing stage of *Narcissus’ Mirror* and *Prae* attempts to formulate his philosophy on language and creation, tests the possibility of expanding the connotations of words and the static strength of the pillars of sentence structures together with the textures in between them — may bravely say that, following Wittgenstein, he learnt the essence of writing while writing these two books. And what is one made of, if not the most essential point of his writing method and style? Masks have to be taken off both from things and from men, and these figures laid bare must be described through infinitely long passages, through nuance-analysis and miniatures, these figures who have been fermented by their mask-double. Gide might have read the following passage in Montaigne: “He is painting his self-portrait in order to be able to get rid of his mask. And since the mask is rather typical of the age and of the country and not of man, men can be differentiated from each other mainly by their masks; in those who have been deprived of their masks we may easily recognize our fellow friend who is like us.”⁷ To understand how well Wittgenstein’s logic and Szentkuthy’s writing correspond to each other (“Objects I can only *name*. Signs can represent them. I can only speak of them. I cannot assert them. A proposition can only say

⁶ Szentkuthy, *Ágoston olvasása közben* (While Reading Augustine) (Pécs: Jelenkor, 1993) 37.

⁷ Montaigne, *A tapasztalásról*, op. cit. 12.

how a thing is, not *what* it is.”)⁸ it is enough to substitute the word “proposition” with “representation.” The fact that for Szentkuthy the act of writing does not happen in a fervor of creation but it is a constant inner urge, or as he wrote: *hippochondria* manifesting itself in the will to write — the thought will be articulated not much later in the essay *While Reading Augustine*:

“I am nothing else but the maddeningly persistent *will* and this is most horrid: in the world of thoughts, nerves, obsessions and manias it is will that is not worth a penny. I am still will, desperate, just as Greco: Greco.”⁹

Prae-existent subjects and early mask versions appear in *Narcissus’ Mirror*, which Szentkuthy refers to as a double-stage mystery play. (According to my knowledge of his oeuvre, he has succeeded in realizing this double stage performance and puppet show best in his work *Cicero’s Wandering Years*. He himself writes the following on this novel: “The theatre describing characters and analyzing reality will always remain a barren and ridiculous freak of nature: one theatre is real — puppet theatre.”¹⁰) Is it a lot or is it too little? In this fragment (as in any other of his works), questions remain questions and sometimes they disquiet us by their unanswerability, or they make the reader crazy by their self-multiplying nature, or just by their contradictions they point to the untenability of chaos and inaccurate thinking. His attitude as a writer already in its *prae*-form implies the attitude of the mature writer: the writer must question the phenomena of the world again and again, because this is the only possibility to brake up the structure of the world into elements, continually producing itself, so to create its new order. Szentkuthy, who, in relation to creation, is passionately questioning chaos and order, unformed elements and structures, despite his Christian approach, agrees to the old wisdom that chaos is a natural state in existence, while on the contrary, order is unnatural, requiring constantly conscious and serious efforts by its creator.

⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. C.K. Ogden (London, Kegan Paul, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1922) 33, 3.221.

⁹ Szentkuthy, *While Reading Augustine*, op. cit. 73.

¹⁰ Szentkuthy, *Cicero vándorévei* (Cicero’s Wandering Years) (Budapest: Szépirodalmi 1990) 53.

III.

Why did Szentkuthy leave *Narcissus' Mirror* in fragments and in a manuscript form? And why did he forget about this early piece of work in his later confessions? On the one hand we have to state the fact that this book contains rough sentence structures, sketchy descriptions that do not necessarily contribute to the unforgettable and imperishable golden pages of his oeuvre. It is enough to cite a few examples that remained in his text due to the fervor of the writing process and the lack of later corrections:¹¹ “only the babbling of a little, invisible fountain was illuminating,” or: “There were no lights anywhere but some objects press their invisible weight into the night to substitute for light...” Both examples are taken from the chapter formed later, when the young bishop attempts to make the Spanish king confess his sins. All throughout Szentkuthy's oeuvre, there is a rich, mutually supporting and drifting accumulation of adjectives; in this chapter, however, adjectives are limp, pale, overwritten and uncontrolled, and as the above examples demonstrate, sentences and descriptive details are not free of *catachresis*, mixed metaphors, and linguistic impurity. We have to conclude that *Narcissus' Mirror* is not an evenly written text; neither in its style, nor in its tone or standards. Despite the careful editing work there is a serious break in the text: in the beginning of the Alcibiades monologue, the style and the tone changes. In *Narcissus' Mirror*, Szentkuthy's two faces — later forming in his works — appear in their *prae* versions. In the beginning of the text we recognize his first face in the images described and flowing unhindered, and the hidden, underlying story making; in the Alcibiades monologue, the other aspect of his “face” appears: the one who loves contemplation despite excelling in negating philosophy, reflects on the meaning and potency of words, defining his existence as a writer — this aspect of his face is better elaborated than the first one and we should not forget that it is an excellent *prae*-version of the self who wrote *Towards the Only Metaphor*, *Cicero's Wandering Years*, *Marginalia on Casanova*, and *Confession and Puppet Show*.

¹¹ It became a work thanks to Mária Tompa, the editor. Livia Mohás protested that “it would have been beneficial if the editor of this volume, Mária Tompa, were to weed out the text more radically” and in her summary on the novel would list a few unimaginable “paralytic stupidities” - *A mítosz mítosza, In memoriam Szentkuthy Miklós* (Budapest: Nap Kiadó 2001) 270.

On the other hand, it is likely that Gábor Halász's criticism of *Præ* ("One mistake he is not able to leave behind: repetition [...] he even repeats plot fragmenting languidly: in connection to similes he wanders off [...] there are jumps to the past, unnecessary inserts alternating each other; surprise is absent, they are infinite and they could be ten times more or ten times fewer. Where is the proud architectural idea, the dignity of proportions?")¹² made Szentkuthy think and even stopped him in writing *Narcissus' Mirror* so passionately since he had to admit that the above objections, with certain constraints, were still valid for his novel under preparation. Szentkuthy would leave the shaping of this work behind — by pure defiance or due to the compulsion to prove (as a Picasso type of cubist painter who, by critics, is accused of not knowing the expertise of his art although he is only deviating from classical forms) and without hesitation began to write a novel-type novel: this is how *A Chapter on Love* was born, which is at the same time an organic continuation of *Narcissus' Mirror*, and the most novel-type novel of the entire oeuvre — if we still would like to insist on genre definitions.

(Translated by Gabriella Ágnes Nagy)

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¹² Gábor Halász, *Tiltakozó nemzedék* (Protesting Generation) (Budapest: Magvető 1981) 737.

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Miklós Szentkuthy, *Doctor Haydn* (fragment)¹

Translated by Tim Wilkinson



The requiem-envisioning soul of “Papa” Josephus Haydn, *doctoris Oxoniensis*, was not borne by the angel wings of St. Peregrine, in gallant gesture, to Paris, but the Parisians were brought to Vienna in November 1805. The kettledrum rolls that had been no more than musical phantoms in his C major Mass in Times of War, the “Paukenmesse,” now sounded for real in Vienna’s misty, muddy, rain-soaked streets.

¹ Published in 1959, Szentkuthy’s *Doctor Haydn* is a fictionalized biography of the composer [Miklós Szentkuthy, *Doktor Haydn* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1959)]. The novel was reprinted twice [Miklós Szentkuthy, *Doktor Haydn*, 2nd ed. (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1979); Miklós Szentkuthy, *Doktor Haydn*, 3rd ed. (Budapest: Magvető, 2009)]. Tim Wilkinson’s translation was previously published in *The Hungarian Quarterly* 50, No. 193 (spring 2009) 80–84. The translated fragment contains the final pages of the novel. (F. S.)

Haydn had his chair pulled a little closer to the window, still elegant even at a time like this, somewhat nervously smoothing his periwig, his breastpin, and his lace cuffs, cursing the cook and the manservant for being so cowardly not to dare step near the window when he called out for more wine (and he was calling out for it at a slightly brisker tempo than normal), but crouched over, hands trembling, as they brought him the glass on a tray polished to a dazzling brightness. This they considered recklessly tempting fate. “Papa” was sitting there in full formal rig — “like a fully decked-out whore, don’t you think?” the maestro demanded of his white-faced servants. Yes, there he sat, next to the undrawn curtains and wide-open window shutters, like some kind of white doll who has lost his wits, calling down God’s judgment upon his head with suicidal insouciance. But “Papa” wanted to see at close quarters what the French revolutionary perdition that had so unsettled his life over the past twenty years or so looked like. Compared with this French triumph in the autumn of 1805, every bat squeak that had issued from Paris hitherto had been child’s play.

“Papa” conducted a quick inspection, tapping along on two sticks from one corner of the room to the other: music scores — in order; catalogue of works — ready and to hand; fortepiano — fine (he struck two notes, though it was more in the form of a resigned pat on the face of an old servant, his ring clicking as it hit the keyboard, his hands being greatly emaciated by now); he counted his silver; his clothes had been given a good shaking and brush; the valet assured him with a half-witted gesture (fright having robbed him of speech) that he had also swept and waxed the floor under the carpet. “Papa” then resumed his seat in the window and looked at the strangely shaped cannons. He was familiar only with the cannons used in Nelson’s navy, Nelson himself having made drawings of them for him; they were over there, in the top drawer of the writing desk with the silver knobs: unquestionably extremely useful and bracing documents to have on the day Bonaparte was marching in — at which thought “Papa” permitted himself a smile. He immediately

proceeded to swear, because the manservant had set the glass of wine down a long way from the armchair, and the cushion that had been fastened to it by twine had naturally slipped to one side, *wie immer bei solchen apokalyptischen Gelegenheiten* — as always on apocalyptic occasions like this — servants were such yellow-bellied wretches!

Haydn nodded off beside the window. The cook and the manservant promptly seized the chance to scramble on hands and knees, keeping their heads down even when this close to the ground, and pull Signor Giuseppe further back into the room, but they had barely finished this stealthy maneuver and were about to straighten up when suddenly they were sent quite literally sprawling because a splendid French carriage came to a halt right in front of the window. There were bawling red-jacketed soldiers on the horses, on the box and at the rear, clearly throwing Latin vehemence into a heated argument over whether this was the right place to stop or not. “Papa” himself was awoken from his dreams by the commotion made by horses and men, and, by the time he had more or less come to, he could only see even more dreamlike things in the room — as if he had merely snoozed on a bit more.

Two French gentlemen were standing before him, one shorter and podgier in ceremonial dress, his decorations tinkling like sacring bells, the other taller and gaunter, a slim briefcase under his arm, in which no more than one or two documents could be lurking, but those such as would decide Vienna’s fate for centuries to come. It was this briefcase that “Papa” noticed first on awakening: he’s no doubt some fat cat, because scribes from the revenue office scurry about with much fatter bundles of paper than that.

On politely introducing themselves, it turned out that the cantankerous, damnably spry soldier was one of Bonaparte’s marshals, Monsieur Soult by name, the other, who inspected the piano with arms folded and nodded at him, with a diplomatic “*Enfin!* We’ve tracked this one down too!” expression written all over his face — that was Monsieur Maret, secretary of state, senator, and the Tacitus who drafted Bonaparte’s bulletins.

The cook and the manservant were wailing and moaning so noisily in the doorway that the gentlemen could not possibly let it pass without comment, besides which the tragicomic scene provided an excellent excuse for starting a conversation. The secretary of state commented that the domestic servants' laments were fully justified since, no two ways about it, Marshal Soult, by a bold attack from the rear, had succeeded in capturing Vienna's prize strategic point, the "*padre della musica's*" study! Naturally, he, Senator Maret, only wished to write down this imperial bulletin on the basis of personal on-the-spot observation. In so doing, they were also expressing their extraordinary pleasure: l'Empereur had entrusted them to pass on his own imperial greetings, and wished his dear Haydn good health and continued creative fervor, and on this, the first day of his entry into the city, he wished to assure the Padre that he would consider guaranteeing the peace requisite for that work an agreeable duty of the first rank.

While Secretary Maret was communicating this to "Papa," who, as if in response to a magic word, had raised himself from his seat without the aid of sticks, ruddy-faced Marshal Soult (not so long ago he was as yet no more than a faceless peasant lad), puffing like Vulcanus, thrust two plump purses into the hands of the gormlessly gawping domestics and, clanking the tip of his scabbard between their ankles, drove them with a roar of laughter out of the room.

"Papa" wept like a child from emotion (there had been plenty to blub about in recent months), but retained a genteel and haughty bearing, as if all his years of training at Eszterháza were only now coming to a first and last true flowering. He conversed amiably in good old Weenie style, at times treating the Imperial Marshal and Foreign Secretary of State as if they were grandsons paying him a visit on his name day, almost letting fall a "*These tiny-tots are just too much!*" Maybe he even said it, because I was quite sure that, in the course of a liberal quaffing of wine and toasting he repeatedly remarked that for twenty years this was *not* how he had imagined the first wave of the Paris revolution

sweeping the threshold of his home, not this way, not at all this way. It was hard to credit that this was stone-cold sober reality.

When Senator Maret (his lips, cheeks, scrawny hands and simple clothes as ethereally thin as his briefcase — “Good Lord! He’s wasting away! Whereas I just put on weight each time we occupy a fair-sized village like this *charmante Vienne!*” Marshal Soult averred and was knocking back the wine as if he were gulping down whole apples), so anyway when Senator Maret related that he had heard *la Création du Monde* in Paris, “Papa,” in best schoolboy manner and with charming punctiliousness, played the grand seigneur by bragging that Vienna was also girding up right now for a monumental performance of *The Creation*, but let them just get on with it, he himself was now so frail that there was little chance of his getting to hear too many more reprises.

In fact... “Papa” let them into a little secret... The three men pulled up their chairs close to each other, clutching their glasses to their knees, with “Papa’s” wine trembling in the glittering crystal goblet. To be sure that the noble liquid would end up in a safer spot, Marshal Soult obliged Signor Giuseppe to swallow the lot.

“Papa” recounted that it had been his custom of late, if someone told him that such-and-such was going to happen in three weeks’ time, or two months from today, then he was able to visualize it happening, right before his eyes, exactly as if it had already happened, lest as a result of a blunder on the part of the *capriccio della morte* he were forced beforehand to... After all, I’m not a newborn babe, *vous comprenez*... Anyway, so he should not miss such-and-such, whatever happened...

And not just visualize it: often he asked to be taken to the very places about which they were speaking. Of course, only in the greatest possibly incognito (at this he sniggered as if it were some childish prank). Off and away, to be sure! To where such-and-such things are planned. So, for instance, he had himself carried off to the university assembly hall where Salieri was going

to conduct *The Creation*! It was late in the evening, and he was completely alone in his sedan chair in the middle of the enormous hall, and he had heard the whole concert in advance, seen the glittering audience, heard the applause, seen Princess Esterházy, up on the balcony on the left, in her pink silk dress with the magnolia leaf pattern. Also there was the Archbishop of Vienna, who on this occasion had discovered no secret masonic pestilence in the text, or in the music of the angels, because the moment the Biblical opera — or was it, perhaps, just an operetta? — reached one of the more ticklish sections, Baroness Spielmann had leaned over on his right to entertain him with a tidbit of Vatican tittle-tattle, virtually tipping her *décolletage* onto his episcopal knees, whereas the pianist Mademoiselle Kurzböck from his left had murmured all kinds of Pietist legends into the prelate's ear about the pious prayers that I was saying, day and night, in repentance of my sins ("Prosit!" interjected the good-humored Marshal Soult).

"Yes, I have already seen it all, all of it, sitting on my very own in the darkened assembly hall of the university... *a pisserl Phantasie hab'i doch immer g'habt*,² and even now I can laugh that there are things that have already been set down in black and white in my memory but the Viennese are still waiting for it in the future. That's a smart way of outwitting people, don't you think?"

Marshal Soult, not being exactly a shrinking violet, nor the most sensitive of souls, was quite incapable of supposing this about anybody else (let's face it, he was not exactly a soul of plain ordinary tact either), latched on to "Papa's" idea of using a story about the future — and thus craftily cheating death — by relating things in the past perfect, and so, slapping shoulders, he explained how lucky "Papa" was that Bonaparte was now installed in Schönbrunn Palace instead of Kaiser Franz! How much more magnificent was the funeral that he "had put on" for "Papa"; how much more sumptuous the catafalque that he set up; how much more ostentatious the honor guard that had saluted around the bier; how much more musical the requiem mass that

² I've always had an imaginative touch.

had been sung. And while the irrepressible Soult, in a simulation of sobbing, embraced the maestro, the maestro himself laughed heartily at the heavy humor of the joke — a soldierly riposte to “Papa’s” train of thought. Prosit! Cheers!

Showing plainly by his expression that he did not much approve of the marshal’s crude “riposte,” Secretary of State Maret, with the aim of diverting the company into a more proper channel, asked the maestro whether it would be placing too great a strain on his powers for him to play them something.

“Papa” rose to his feet, again without the assistance of sticks, quaffed from the glass that Soult, with a jingle of his spurs, offered him and sat down at the fortepiano, a crafty smirk on his face. He played the *Gottes Hymne*, the Austrian Emperor’s Hymn.

Senator Maret pulled a face as if wincing in pain (though no sound passed his lips), whereas Marshal Soult roared with laughter and even began to sing along with “Papa,” meanwhile muttering towards Maret in a barely comprehensible voice: “Stuff this in your bulletin!”

Haydn, the way one often finds with the old and the sick, suddenly, from one moment to the next, became deadly worn-out, his white face turning even whiter, as if he were on the verge of passing out. Maret and Soult reached for his arms from both sides, but with a gentleness that signaled it was nothing but politeness on their part, by no means a matter of tending to a sick man. They accompanied him back to his armchair, where Haydn quickly recovered. Marshal Soult, guided by some rural instinct, spoke more softly, upon which the senator became livelier in order to avoid falling into a hospital whisper. They entertained the padre with a few more military anecdotes, and when they bade farewell, against all etiquette and sincere protestations, Haydn escorted them to the gate.

He stood at the gate for a long time, watching the carriage as it hurtled off, but the street just would not settle down and it was impossible to see across to the other side for the crowds of dragoons, hussars and gunners. The

cook and the manservant were standing towards the back of the cool gateway, holding a warm coat and well-lined headgear at the ready to proffer the instant that the master should set off back inside. Haydn spurned them. Politely, of course, more politely as if they had been marshals and senators.

Before opening the door to his bedroom, he listened for a long time beside it. Inside the parrot was delivering a monologue: "*Guten Abend, Herr Haydn! Guten Abend, Herr Haydn! Guten Abend — !*" It suddenly broke off its discourse, no doubt because a fly had buzzed into the cage, and could any historical event in the world be more important than that! — *Nicht wahr? nicht wahr? nicht wahr?*

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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Misztérium és humor:

A tanulmányíró Szentkuthy Miklós



József J. Fekete

*„Ruhád lazán engedd neki a szélnek, s a hajad
is legyen szalagtalan, szabad – Ez édes
hanyagság jobban felkavar, mint a Művészet
minden hitszegése.” — Ben Jonson¹*

Szentkuthy Miklós *Múzsák testamentuma* című tanulmánykötete² több mint fél évszázad alatt, 1927 és 1983 közt írt elméleti munkáit, főként tanulmányait tárta

¹ Szentkuthy Miklós idézi *Ben Jonson* című tanulmányában (1937)

² Szentkuthy Miklós: *Múzsák testamentuma*. Magvető Kiadó, Budapest. 1985

az olvasó elé, a megjelenés előtt álló második kötetbe³ a szerző hagyatékát gondozó Tompa Mária olyan tanulmányokat, kritikákat, könyvajánlásokat, emlékeztetéseket, szabadegyetemi előadásokat válogatott be, amelyek korábban, vagy 1985 után keletkeztek, rádióműsorokban hangoztak el, korábban kötetbe nem kerültek, hanem folyóiratok közölték őket. Tekintettel, hogy a *Múzsák testamentuma* folytatása még nem jelent meg, a továbbiakban az oda sorolt Szentkuthy-tanulmányok folyóirat-közléseire hivatkozom. A tanulmányok keletkezéstörténetéről tudni kell, hogy Szentkuthy 1948 és 1958 között teljes szilencium alatt állt, ez alatt az idő alatt tanulmány se jelenhetett meg tőle. Nem csupán hogy elúszott a várt egyetemi katedrája, hanem komoly egzisztenciális veszélyben érezte magát, ennek a maga körött mindent megfojtó légkörnek a lenyomatát felfedezhetjük a regényeiben, ám az előadásaiban, tanulmányaiban nyoma sincs, ott fölszabadultan és vidáman vezette végig a témáit. Ennek hozadéka, hogy a tanulmányok Szentkuthy legkönnyebben érthető művei, a tudás átadásának életes alakzatai.

Úgy érdemes elolvasni ezeket a tanulmányokat, ha már előtte átböngésztünk néhány Szentkuthy-regényt. Azért, mert a regényekben felvetett kérdések egy részére ezekben a szövegekben találjuk meg a feleletet, egy-egy tanulmányrészlet beleillik a szerző szépirodalmi alkotásainak körébe, sőt, egyes esszénovellái kimondottan szépirodalmi jellegű művek; itt világosodik meg az író által számtalanszor és megannyi formában hangoztatott huszadik századi irodalmi életmű egységének igénye. Szentkuthy nem csupán a formai egység mellett foglalt állást az életmű esetében, hanem az ideális műalkotást is egyetemesnek, összegzőnek képzelte el, amely magában foglalja a szerzőnek a léttel kapcsolatos teljes viszonyát, megtalálván ehhez az adekvát, elemző és összegző kifejezési módot és tág, a mondandó és az alkotói képzelőerő által képlékenyén tett formát. Ebből eredően elveti a tematikai megkötések és a különböző tartalmi egységek mellé beidegződött formákat. Az alkotás céljának az egyetemes műveltség teljes

³ *Múzsák testamentuma II.* Várhatóan 2012 késő őszén jelenik meg a budapesti Hamvas Intézet kiadásában. A tanulmányhoz a kötet gépiratát használtam, így nincs lehetőségem a hivatkozások pontosítására, oldalszámok jelölésére, csupán a tanulmányok címét, eredeti megjelenésének helyét és idejét jelölöm a lábjegyzetekben. [A tanulmánykötet 2012 decemberében jelent meg *Varázskert* címen – Filip Sikorski.]

felhasználását tekinti a szerzői önkifejezés-igényén átszűrve, vagyis az intellektus eruptív (impulzív) és konstruktív művészi felhasználását.

De mi is a műveltség? – teszi fel a kérdést a tanulmányíró. A választ az 1947-ben írt, *Műveltség és irodalom* című tanulmányában fogalmazta meg: „Történelemtől, természettől, emberi és állati lélekről, művészetéről és vallásról, egyáltalában egész világunkról a lehető legtöbb dolgot tudni és ismerni.”⁴ Gyanúsan egyszerű és kerek ez a definíció annak a gondolkodónak a tollából, aki a problémafelvetésnél az alapfogalmak matematikai szigorral történő meghatározását követeli, de ugyanakkor tudja, hogy az ilyen meghatározásokra éppen a nyelv a legalkalmatlanabb. Természetesen ez esetben sem áll meg ennél a szófukar megfogalmazásánál. Leglényegesebb meglátása, hogy a műveltséget, mint fogalmat, a legradikálisabban a földre kell szállítani az „intellektuális szférából”, mert csak így lehet igazi műveltség. Úgy kell rá tekinteni, mint a többi élettani jelenségre, mert nem tabu az intellektus, hanem az emberiség eleme, és meg kell tanulni használni, alkalmazni és élvezni az emberi agy ezen funkcióját: azaz, hogy az egyén alkalmazni tudja ismereteit, ne maradjon a műveltség holt anyag, pusztán gondolati lexikon. A Szentkuthy-esszék és -tanulmányok mindezek értelmében létfontosságú jelenségként kezelik a kultúrát és a műveltséget.

A tízéves *Mikes Kelemen Akadémia* című rádióelőadásában⁵ arról számolt be, hogy egy sor fiatal író, tudós, így jómagam is a fasiszmus hatalomra jutásának és expanziójának idején egyfajta szellemi emigrációba vonult. Horváth Béla katolikus költő és Füsi József 1936-ban megalakította a Mikes Kelemen Akadémiát, amely a határozottan baloldali, modern gondolkodású írókat, irodalomtudósokat, történészeket, művészettörténészeket gyűjtötte egybe, akik „szembehelyezkedtek a banál sovíniszta és bambán ókonzervatív írkokkal”. A rövid életű, a háború alatt már nem működő Mikes Kelemen Akadémia tagjai voltak: Devecseri Gábor, Halász Gábor, Hevesi András, Horváth Tibor, Hunyady Sándor, Jankovich Ferenc, Jékely Zoltán, Képes Géza, Kerecsényi Dezső, Kolozsvári Grandpierre Emil, Márai Sándor, Sőtér István, Cs. Szabó László, Szerb Antal, Szentkuthy Miklós, Tolnai Gábor, Vas István, Weöres Sándor. A társaság az egyik legnagyobb

⁴ *Műzsák testamentuma*. 83. o.

⁵ *Holmi*, 1992. január

szabású összejövetelet Szentkuthy Derék-utcai lakásán rendezte meg, aminek emlékét az Orpheus-sorozat *Cynthia* című fejezete őrzi. Joggal érezték, hogy a szabad intelligencia üldöztetés áldozata lesz, és tiltakoztak, mert az úgynevezett művelt középosztályt olcsón megvásárolta magának a banális, műveletlen irodalom. Ezek a fiatalok nyelveket beszéltek, rengeteget olvastak, tanultak, meggyőződésük volt, hogy „az értelem nem ellensége a nagyköltészetnek”, hiszen „az ún. bolondos vagy frivolnak látszó modern írók, a Giraudoux- és Joyce-fajta, épp azért bolondosak, mert végtelen tudással és lírai mélységekből nézik a számukra nagyon is komoly életet.” Ennél fogva szellemi céljuk volt az angolos nemtörődömség, meg a francia könnyedség és mozgékonyság ötvözése, amit Szentkuthy már 1934-ben megjelent *Prae* című regényében számtalan látószögből bemutatva európai színvonalon megfogalmazott.

A művész saját művészetét gazdagítja a műveltséggel – és miként Szentkuthy megállapítja –, minél nagyobb műveltséggel rendelkezik, annál démonikusabban, eruptívabban és egyértelműbben támadja az intellektuális műveltséget, hogy viasztorítsa az iránta megnyilvánuló fétis-tiszteletet. S gondoljunk csak vissza, mi más Szentkuthy szépírói tevékenységének summája, ha nem a haláltáncos, démoni hahota az európai műveltség felett? Mintha könyvek párosodásából született volna – írta a szerzőről Hamvas Béla –, és ha valóban így van, akkor ő volt az, aki elsőként tagadta meg szüleit. Mert bálványozta ugyan a könyveket és az intellektus minden más produktumát, de minden pillanatban kész volt végtelen szeretetéből fakadóan nemcsak szemberöhögni, de szembe is köpni azokat. Sznob ebből a szempontból Szentkuthy, mert nem képes élvezni a fél- és álműveltséget, de az intellektust iránti vak rajongást se. Olyan sznob, aki szerint „a műveltség döntő ismérve az lesz, hogy valaki a legnagyobb tudással hogyan *bánik*, milyen a *viszonya* a tudáshoz általában [...] eszményünk [...] ebből a szempontból – Rabelais.”⁶

Rabelais hatását a szerző írói munkásságára már néhány vázlatvonalban feltárta a műkritika és -elemzés, Szentkuthy maga is gyakorta hivatkozott a francia reneszánsz szatirikusának vérbő kalandregényeire. A párhuzam valós mértékét nem határozhatnánk meg Rabelais öt könyvének és a *Szent Orpheus Breviáriuma* öt

⁶ *Múzsák testamentuma* 88. o.

kötetének filológiai összevetésével. A hasonlóság ugyanis a szerzők világszemléletének közelségében rejlik, a tudálékosság, a kultúra, pontosabban a civilizáció kivagyiságának gargantuai magasságból való helyretevésében, az intellektus mélységes vágyában, az érzékeny idegrendszer áradó lobbanásában, a kalandosság keresésében és a katalogizálás, a számbavétel igényében. Nem csupán ezt örökölte Szentkuthy szellemi elődjétől, hanem a szabad nyelvkezelést, az ironikus ábrázolást, a legvadabb szellemi bukfeneket, ami minden munkájában, alanyi megnyilatkozásában és tárgyilagos okfejtésében jelen van. Egy idézet erejéig itt még vissza kell térnünk a *Műveltség és irodalom* című tanulmányához, hogy megtudjuk, miért eszményíti a francia humanistát. „Mert tudta a középkor és a reneszánsz minden filozófiáját és orvostudományát, teknőcök csontképződésétől az angyalszárnyak hőellenállásáig: és ebből egy óriási *kozmikus burleszket*⁷ csinált, az, amit ő a középkorban kigúnyolt, pontosan az, amit ma a 'sznobok' és 'entellektüelek' kivégzésekor csinálnánk: vagyis a nagy műveltség harca a kis műveltség, a démoni tehetség nélküli 'műveltség' ellen.”⁸

Az írónak tehát orvosnál alaposabban kell ismernie az anatómiát és a gyógyászatot, pszichiáternél a lélekelemzést, geológusnál a földtant, szociológusnál a szociológiát, azért, hogy alakjai plasztikusabbak, történetei valósabbak, a valóságnál is valósabbak legyenek. Ezért a tudásukért (műveltségükért) becsülte Szentkuthy igazán nagyra Joyce-ot és Proustot (akikkel szövegeinek értelmezői gyakran hozták kapcsolatba), és ezért utasította el határozottan a francia új regényt (amihez ugyancsak örömet odoorolták munkásságát). A realitást mindennél magasabb eszménynek tartotta, miként arról a *Chartres szobrai*⁹ című remek esszéjében a következőket írja: „Ha apostolokat vagy Juda királynőit kell az oszlopok közé varázsolnia, mit törődik a művész a Bibliával vagy a korabeli történészek meddő vitáival! Egyszerűen körülnéz a piacon, és az ott járkáló öregurakat vagy fiatal

⁷ Miként Ágfalvi Attila megállapította a *Szentkuthy-mozi* című cikkében (*Filmvilág*, 1982/12), ilyen szempontból legpompázatosabb munkái az *Udvari nász* és az *Udvari gyász* című bábjátékai, amelyek „roppant szórakoztatóan ötvözik a Kemény Henrik-féle pofozkodós bábhagyományt az 'ordenaré burleszkkel', a grand guignolt az abszurd humorral.” Ugyanezen két bábjáték kapcsán sugallta Kabdebó Lóránt, hogy a Szentkuthyban a komédiával együtt forrongó morális prófétálás csodálatos drámaírói adhatott volna a magyar irodalomnak. (Kabdebó Lóránt: „*Morálba vadult komédiás*”. *Kortárs*, 1988/1)

⁸ *Műzsák testamentuma*, 88–89. o.

⁹ A kézirat dátuma: 1948. november. Közölte: *Stádium*, 1988. szeptember.

suhancokat mintázza a katedrális falára. S valóban, van-e nagyobb szentség és nagyobb szépség egyszerre, mint a közvetlen emberi valóság?”

Tanulmányaiban (James Joyce, 1947; *Miért újra Ulysses?*, 1968; *A kívülálló bosszúja*, 1962) Joyce és Proust határtalan realitásigényét hozta közös nevezőre, és a realizmus legmarkánsabb képviselőinek tekintete ő ket. Joyce realizmusának gyökerét vallási emlékeinek kiirthatatlanságában, tudományos érdeklődésében és racionalitásának szembesülésében látta az élet irracionális forгатagával szemben. Proust esetében „a szerkezet fenséges teljessége, az értelem [...] szinte eszelős csökönyössége, és végül: minden megfigyelt testi és lelki jelenségnek *legplasztikusabb* kifejezése: ez a három tette azt, hogy műve nem lett az idegérzékenyek fájdalmas, de művészileg használhatatlan nyavalygása [...]. Tipikusan *nem* neurotikus mű [*Az eltűnt idő nyomában*], nem a Freud-ipar olcsó nyersanyaga.”¹⁰ Proustnál tehát a századvég neuraszténiája kap szigorúan racionális, huszadik századi szerkezeti keretet, Joyce-ot pedig éppen a neurotikus hajlam ösztönzi a barokk végtelenséggel halmozó és monumentális realista kompozícióba: „Joyce a gyáva, megfélemlített, csak bámulni, de cselekedni nem tudó, ügyetlen álmodozó – a benyomások itt túl nagy izgalommal túl mélyre hatolnak, rögzítődnek, 'traumák' lesznek –, a bűntudat, halálfélelem, bujkáló onanizmus, az érzékszervek összehangolatlan túlfogékonysága, nihilista káoszézés vesz körül egy eldobott villamosjegyet, egy női térdhajlást vagy szenteltvíznyomot a homlokráncban.”¹¹ Szentkuthy ezt igazán belülről érezhette, hiszen ő fordította magyarra Joyce *Ulysses*-ét.

Ismét párhuzamot kell vonnunk a tanulmányok tételei és az irodalmi művek között: a gótikus katedrális-építkezés Szentkuthy egyik folyton visszatérő témája, sőt, szerkesztési elve, abból kiindulva, hogy ha már a világ kaotikus, akkor a művészi megfogalmazása legyen a legszigorúbban racionalista. Szentkuthy számára a fogalmak matematikai pontosságú definiálása az eszmény, így mi más lenne a szerkesztésben, mint a geometria? De nem úgy, miként azt Robbe-Grillet elképzelte (*Nouveau Roman?* 1967), vagyis, hogy a mérnöki leírásokkal kiküszöbölje az „emberszabású hasonlatokat és metaforákat” (Szentkuthy itt

¹⁰ *Múzsák testamentuma*, 285. o.

¹¹ i.m. 107. o.

azonnal közbeveti, hogy a geometria ugyanolyan emberszabású, mint a hasonlat), hanem a halmozó barokk mintájára, a szigorú kompozíciós vonalak között a nyelv lehetőségeivel a legteljesebben élve kitölteni. Hiszen „az *Ulysses* azért íródott, hogy megmutassa, az ember mindössze egy pár érzelmi, értelmi és nyelvi sémának buta szajkója, vak és egyénietlen képzettársító gép.”¹² És „Joyce egyik – hogy úgy mondjuk – letragikusabb pikantériája éppen az, hogy rossz szemű ember csak egy talmi dadaista szóhalmazt lát benne, míg a hozzáértő éppen az egészen rendkívüli műveltségét élvezzi: mint az egész kompozíció egyik legdöntőbb hajtóerejét.”¹³

A kompozíció és a realizmus kérdésköréhez tartozik a nyelv, ami Szentkuthynál jószerevével azonos a műveltség fogalmával, mert ő igazából a nyelv minden területét felhasználja műveiben: a tudományos szakzsargont, résztudományi szóképletet, az irodalmi nyelv eszköztárát, a legegyszerűbb analógiákat és többpólusú metaforákat és ezerarcú színesztéziákat, filozófiai szövegfoszlányokat, a legfrissebb pesti argót – mindet mint a realizmus eszközt. Olvasója számára az is természetesen cseng, hogy a filozófus alkalmazza az argót, az apacs pedig az einsteini lexikát. Világzsemléletéből kiolvasható, hogy írói munkájában célul tűzte ki a világ egymástól végletesen távol lévő dolgainak nyelvi közelítését. Az „utcanyelv” – írta a *Nagyvilág* ankétjára válaszolva (*Trágárság és irodalom*. 1968) –, „a város dúsgazdag népdala. Ez pedig kell a) *realizmushoz* és kritikához, b) fantáziához [...] a fantasztikus, színes, vad utcanyelv irodalmi realizmus, kritika, burzsujköpő világnézet. [...] igenis használják az írók az utcanyelvet, mert hasonlat és szókép ez, képzelet és ezer jó metafora, szemtelenül cinikus.”¹⁴

Ha már a nyelvnél tartunk, emlékeztetnék a bevezetőben tett felvetésemre, hogy írónk esszéit és tanulmányait regényei ismeretében érdemes olvasni. Hozzá kell tennem, az a laza, szorongásmentes beszédmód, amivel tanulmányaiban találkozunk, olykor egyenesen regényszöveggént szervesül. A következő bekezdés, amelyben első férjes asszony szeretőjével megesett randevújáról ír, könnyedén odaképzeltető a *Fejezet a szerelemről-től a Bianca Lanza di Casalanzaig* bármely regény oldalaira, noha a szerző éppen csak a pesti kávéházakra emlékezik: „Nagyon

¹² i.m. 109. o.

¹³ i.m. 108. o.

¹⁴ i.m. 474. o.

más 'színpadon' játszottuk drámánkat, mint a Halász Gábor-fajták. Csillárok, aranykarok, virágok, luxusitalokkal teli bárpolcok, Althea estélyi ruhában (mosolyogtak is rajta...), fekete selyem aranszálakkal át- meg átszőve, egzotikus turbánja ugyanabból az anyagból. Lihegő szépségének egyik fő-fő varázsa: óriási szemhéja volt, két fehér lehullott rózsaszírom kanalas domborulata. Ennek a fülledt-mákonyos 'soirée'-szcénának ellentéte volt később lakásán (tomboló nagytakarítás miatt valami 'cselédszobába' szorultunk, égő nyáridőben): Vénusz-mivoltáról lehullatta kék zsák, nyers vitorlavászon vestimentumát – ezredmásodperc alatt jelent meg a hónál havasabb, Holdnál holdasabb Vénusz-imágó, a vitorlavászon holmit (zuhanása ilyen abszolút kinyilatkoztatás volt) mintha a föld vagy tenger nyelte volna el, trionfo da Primavera!...”¹⁵

Szentkuthy vállalja a Joyce-szal és Prousttal való rokonságát, de csak akkor, ha az előbbi nem azonosítja a halandzsászó szóhalmaz-raktárnokkal, az utóbbit pedig nem csapják egy kalap alá Freuddal. Ezzel ellentétben elutasító a francia új regény művelőivel szemben. Olyan indulatosan, mint a *Nouveau Roman*? című tanulmányában, csupán a regényeiben kelt ki bármi ellen is. Miként a tanulmány címében jelen lévő kérdőjel is mutatja, Szentkuthy nem értett egyet Robbe-Grillet és társai irodalmi tevékenységének se újdonságával (mi volt a *Prae*, ha nem új, experimentális regény?), se azzal, hogy az új regény megfelelő válasz lenne a világ percipiálására. És ha valahol igazán állást foglalt az ál- és félműveltséggel szemben (vagyis elítélte a műveltséggel hivatkozást), akkor itt tette, ebben a terjedelmes tanulmányban. Még személyes oka is lehetett rá, mert a *Praet* is szívesen beszorították volna az ellenregény skatulyájába, ugyanakkor azt meg nem véve észre, hogy a maga korában ez a mű megelőzte a francia irányzatot. Hosszantartó és felesleges lenne végigkövetni itt azt a filológiai és irodalomtörténeti utat, amit Szentkuthy körbejár, hogy bizonyítsa Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, Claude Simon, Robert Pinget, Samuel Becket és Julien Cracq módszereinek avíttóságát, epigonságát, az „új dialógus”, a „meddő fecsegés” újrafelfedezésében az irodalmi eszköztár leporolt rekvizitumait, a freudizmus ismételt homloktérbe állításában a felmelegített Virginia Woolfot, sőt Dosztojevszkijt. „Az embernek ma [...] nincs döntően új viszonya világgal” –

¹⁵ *Eltűnt kávéházak nyomában. Rakéta folyóirat*, 1986. május 6.

mondja ki Szentkuthy; és hiába ígér az új regény új realitást az egyik oldalról, ha ezt a műalkotás művi izgalmaival kívánjuk kiváltani. És milyen eszközökkel? Szabad asszociációval? (Az éppen a legködtebb dolgok egyike – mutat rá Szentkuthy.) Tárgyfétisekkel? Montázstechnikával? A középkor óta ismert és alkalmazott 'újdonságokkal'? vagy éppen a szociális hangsúlyok kiemelésével, mint ahogy ezt Beckett teszi, akinek „főhősei anonim félhullák, betegek, ő rültek a sárban és pöcegödörben. [...] Ezek a defekáliákkal rokon 'főhősök' persze fikciók: a mindenből kiábrándult ember *nem* ilyen – ezek intellektuális absztrakciók, ezoterikus és elit entellektüelek matematikai formulái [...] csak entellektüelpreparátumok.”¹⁶ Egyszóval minden, csak az nem, ami Szentkuthy műveinek lényege, a valódi realizmus. És még csak egyet emelek ki a szerzőnek legfájóbb tények közül: az ellenregény elveti a cselekményt, a történetet. Valljuk be, a *Prae* nem volt egy kimondott detektívregény, de például a *Breviárium* már a legizgalmasabb, vérbő, intellektuális kalandregény, „theo-krimi”, ahogy a szerző nevezte, és valóban az események karneváli forgatagába sodorja az olvasót. Akár Rabelais, akihez folyton visszatérünk, ha Szentkuthy műveiről beszélünk.

A *Múzsák testamentuma* tulajdonképpen az 1969-ben megjelent *Meghatározások és szerepek* második, bővített kiadása volt. A tanulmányoktól a bírálatokig, a cikktől a körkérdésre adott válaszig, a vitairattól az esszénovelláig változik az egybegyűjtött elméleti írások műfaja a kötetben, de mégis van közös nevezőjük: a tanulmányozott szerző vagy jelenség mögül mindig erőteljesen előtűnik Szentkuthy Miklós, aki műveltségén és intellektusán átszűrve tárta fel az általa taglalt művek, irányzatok, szerzők legrejtettebb titkait is. Álarc mögül kacsint az olvasóra tanulmányaiban is, akár regényeiben. Meglátásai élesek, pontosak és kíméletlenek. Nem lehet „átejteni”, nem „esik hasra” az álmodernség és az álműveltség előtt se 1927-ben, se 1983-ban. A szellem igazi nagyságai iránt pedig ugyanolyan vehemens lelkesedéssel rajong, amilyen indulatos undorral veti el a középszerűség önmutogató tetszelgését a semmi tükrében.

Ha tanulmányírói módszerét kellene definiálnom, ismét hozzá fordulhatnék segítségért: ő látta Halász Gábort az ész szadisztikusan túl lúgos tisztelőjének, Szerb Antalt pedig az embertelen elméletek emberies szinten

¹⁶ *Múzsák testamentuma*, 311. o.

összehangolójának – Szentkuthy elemző módszerének meghatározását e két pólus között kell keresni. Sőtér István alapos elemzés alá vetette Szentkuthy tanulmányíró módszerét, ami alapján a következő felismerést tette: „...nem az író olvad itt tárgyába, hanem a tárgyat olvasztja önnön tudatába, vagyis személyes élményként fogja fel, mint átélt eseményt. Így válik Szentkuthy személyes eseményévé Mozart és Proust, Szabó Lőrinc, Thomas Mann és Arany János.”¹⁷

A tanulmányíró Szentkuthy egyik leghírhedtebb dolgozata az 1941 novemberében a Magyar Csillagban megjelent *A mítosz mítosza*. A tanulmány Kerényi Károly ókori vallástörténeti munkájának, a *Die antike Religion. Eine Grundlegung* című, 1940-ben kiadott könyvének módszerét bírálja. Kerényi és Szentkuthy Szerb Antal jóvoltából közeli barátságban állt egymással, öt-hat éven át részletekbe menően vitáztak a Szókratész-előtti filozófiáról, mitológia-kutatók könyveiről, akikkel szemben Szentkuthy volt az örök ellenzék, és véleményét Kerényi egyenrangú vitapartnerként el is fogadta. Amikor azonban ezt leírva látta viszont, megharagudott, ügyvédhez futott.

Szentkuthy, részben Kerényitől kölcsönzött könyvekből, ismerte W. F. Otto, Karl Reinhardt, Kurt Riezler, Rudolf Otto, Franz Altheim, H. W. Rüssel, Thassilo von Scheffer, Eckart Peterich, Gilbert Murray vallástörténeti munkáit, és jónéhány „fekete megjegyzést” gyűjtött egybe azok „geistesgeschichtliche hochdeutsch hochem mítosz-interpretáció”-járól, és velük szemben a régi mítoszáértelmezéseket vette pártfogásba. Legegyszerűbben fogalmazva azt vette rossz néven ezen kutatók, és végső soron Kerényi módszerében, hogy időbeli, történelmi, földrajzi távlatokra és távolságokra fittyet hányva olyan sematikus ezerarcúságukban ábrázolja az istenfigurákat, mintha azok nem mentek volna évezredes fejlődésen keresztül, mintha a mitológiai szereplők eredetükben is magukban hordozták volna árnyaltságukat, vagy még egyszerűbben: „egy kalap alá vesz ötezer év előtti és ötezer évvel későbbi trák Orpheus- és anatóliai Orpheus-mítoszt.”¹⁸ Az óromantikus német szellem fényeit és árnyait tartotta Szentkuthy meghatározónak Kerényi művében és ezt a Schellingre visszavezethető romantikus programra alapozó mitológiaértelmezést vetette szemére, és minden újdonságot

¹⁷ Sőtér István: *Neuraszténiás nosztalgiák*. Szentkuthy Miklós: *Múzsák testamentuma*. Kritika. 1986/3

¹⁸ *Frivolitások és hitvallások*. 487. o.

megtagadott Kerényitől. A tanulmánynak bizony vannak olyan kitételei, amelyeket Kerényi nem vághatott könnyű szívvel zsebre. „Nagy kultúrák nyomán tenyésző parvenű népek” és „jellegzetesen hervadt kori” műfajához hasonlítja Kerényi opusát, és sommásan állapítja meg, hogy „ebből a sok beszédből és telhetetlen mondattelevényből sokkal előbb vesszük észre az értelmezés végzetes neurotikusságát, betegségét, mint az értelmezett tárgy életszerűségét. Ideges, kielégületlen, életirigy, egyensúlytalan és terméketlen vallomások ezek a görög 'életről' és 'egzisztenciáról.'”¹⁹

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A *Prae* megjelenése óta rejtőzködött olvasói elől Szentkuthy Miklós, természetesen az általa teremtet sajátos világon belül, ahol minden egyben önmaga ellentétét is jelenti; így az álarcok és kosztümök mögötti rejtőzködés sem egyéb, mint egyfajta kitárulkozás. Több mint fél századon át tartott ez az irodalmi közönség előtti önmutogatás, a mű és az alkotó egymásból való táplálkozásának feltárása, ami olyannyira nyilvánvaló Szentkuthy regényeinek témájában, stílusában és alkotói módszerében egyaránt. Ezek a művek – nem győzöm elégszer hangsúlyozni –, az olvasó „szeme láttára” készülnek. A szerző kedve szerint válogat a témák és történetek között, illusztrálja és kommentálja őket, visszakanyarodik a narrációban és az egyik asszociációról a másikra ugorván halad – mindennek ellenére – a precíz mértékkel megtervezett témasoron. A szövegen belül így egymással szembe kerül a rend és a rendetlenség, a szabály és a szabálytalanság, hatalmas teret adván a véletlenszerűségnek, ami Szentkuthy prózaírásában szövegszervező elemként kap szerepet. Így valósította meg művészi célját, amit 1939-ben, természetesen Szentkuthy-módban a következőképpen fogalmazott meg: „Művészi cél? Nincsenek művészi céljaim. Szervezetem van, életkényszerem, szemek, fülek, idegek belső kész végzete, és ugyanakkor tiszta intelligencia, csillogó, bő rajzú raison, mint egy óriási spanyol hajtű, mely a tarkó tájáról emelkedik arab cirkalmaival a hajfűrtök latin vihara fölé. Hogy vallásalapító temperamentum vagyok-e vagy művészi? Mit érdekel engem? Tudom, hogy a valóság nagy-nagy

¹⁹ Magyar Csillag. 1941/11.

izgalom, tudom, hogy én atlantikus mámorú szívvel és Eukleidész-világosságú aggyal járok a valóság szenzáció-paradicsomában, s végül, harmadik axiómaképpen tudom, hogy a valóság és a szenvedélyes-értelmes egyéniségem között valami kapcsolatot kell teremtenem, a magam megmentésére, narkotizálására. Hogy ez a viszony aztán matézis vagy opera, vallás vagy filozófia, idegbetegség vagy hallucináló-gyávaság – oly bagatell kérdések a három princípium mellett, hogy még felemlíteni is nevetséges.”²⁰

Angolnak lenni, franciának lenni, spanyolnak²¹ lenni zsigerből induló próteuszi késztetés Szentkuthy számára. Az utazás viszont nem csupán egyéni óhaj, hanem közösségi elv volt a Mikes Akadémia tagsága közt: „a Mikes Akadémia át meg át van szöve tagjainak nagy utazásaival, amelyek ott élnek könyveikben. Szerb Antal az *Utas és holdvilágban* életfordító Itália-élményét dolgozta fel (kedvence volt különben is a Rilke-sor: 'ez után meg kell hogy változzék életed'). Ahogy Füsi József vaskos Cellini-fordításokkal és Boccaccio-kommentárokkal jött haza. Képes Géza meg valahol északon pontosan ott járt, ahol még a madár sem szokott, kiejthetetlen nevű költőik fordításával akadémikus táskájában. Cs. Szabó a *Doveri átkelésben* az örök-izgalmas angolokról írt a többi kontinentális 'izgulókhoz' méltó értelemmel. Sőtér a mi velencei és firenzei élményeinket varázsolta költészetté és iróniává a *Fellegjárókban*. Weöres Sándor ceyloni és indiai emlékeket szőtt tovább mitologizáló képzeletében: madárfejből kiszűrő madárszeme hogy ragyogott, mikor a nagy, zöld kályha mellett egy asszír hősköltemény fordítását adta elő, vagy szanszkrit sorok ritmusát élvezte szenvedélyes ízleléssel.”²² Érdekes, hogy Szentkuthy számára az utazás soha nem jelentett menekülést, vészterhes időkben kétszer is járt ösztöndíjjal Angliában, senki se számított rá, hogy hazatér Magyarországra, mégis hazament. Az utazás számára nem a depresszív kor és társadalom előli elvonulást jelentette, hanem sokkal inkább a könyvek, az olvasmányélmények gerjesztették kóborló kedvét: „Verne Gyula összes műveinek

²⁰ *Fekete reneszánsz*. 189–190. o.

²¹ „E szöveg írójának egy életén át Spanyolország volt mindene. Eléggé bebizonyította. *Eszkoriál* szentje Borgia Ferenc, *Cynthiáé* Keresztes János, *Európa Minoré* Turibius, *Véres Szamáré* Villanovai Tamás. Most készülő Don Carlos-fantáziájának – *Dogmák és Démonok* – vezérmotívumai (spanyol királyi színekben: Hesperida aranysárgában és Danaida feketében) – örület, kéj, halál és katolicizmus. Mindezzel vérokon Salvador Dali, aki 'képi kódex'-párja írott kódexeimnek.” *Gondolatok a képtárban*. Kortárs, 1985. január

²² *A tízéves Mikes Kelemen Akadémia*

felfalása közben és után: az élet egyetlen érdekes és értelmes, minden egyebet kizáró 'functional behaviour'-jének, tevékeny tartalmának persze hogy az utazást tartottam. És ami a hol nyavalygós-nyafka, hol kamaszokat üdvözítő 'esztétikát' illeti? Szólhat-e hozzá, akár pro, akár kontra, Victor Hugóhoz valaki, ha nem tudja, hogy gyerekkorában Spanyolország volt számára a csodák csodája? Leconte de Lisle? Ő maga: India, testrésze, szerve: a Szunda-szigetek, az őstenyészet, őszallatokat és örök mítoszokat 'felörvénylő' keleti tengerek. A *Romlás Virágainak* gyökere Ceylonban és Madagaszkárban van, Heredia *Centauryai* messzi szigetekről (mellesleg könyvtárakból is...) kavalkádoztak 'vértől részegen' és 'orrfacsaró bűzzel' a legrafináltabb fineszekkel csiszolt és köszörült szonettekbe. Az ős-ős Irish, echt-echt amerikai A. E. Poe: az életadó elixír-injekciót Hellászbán, Itáliában és Isztambulban kapta, a Márvány-tenger Ezeregyéj-közel partjain. És nem pikáns intermezzo-e a pofaszakállas, szemüveges, norvég-viking, Észak-mítosz és európai szocializmus jegesmedve prófétáját, Ibsen a Szuezi-csatorna megnyitásánál, Egyiptom piramisainak árnyékában találni?"²³

* * *

Angolnak lenni, franciának lenni, spanyolnak lenni – regényírói életprogram. A tanulmányíró viszont kiemelt figyelemmel fordult az angol irodalom irányába, zseniális érzékenységgel állította egymás mellé és egymással szembe Shakespeare és Ben Jonson életművét és életét. Kis kitérével jelzem: Szentkuthy számára a mű megismeréséhez elengedhetetlen volt, hogy a szerzőről is minél több ismeretet szerezzen. Kiváló példa erre a *Sorsfordító lelkigyakorlattól végkiárusításig*²⁴ című, Kosztolányi Dezső születésének századik évfordulójára írt esszéje, amelyben a költő által összeállított, *Modern Költők, Külföldi Antológia* című gyűjteményéből szemezgetve valóságos költőportrékat varázsol a versek mögé. Ennek indoklását a *Ben Jonson*²⁵ című rádióelőadásában adta meg: „...ha az irodalomtörténet igazán történelmi módon gondolkodik, úgy az író élete is alkotásnak kell hogy számítsa:

²³ *Sorsfordító lelkigyakorlattól végkiárusításig. Új Írás*, 1985. november

²⁴ Megjelent: *Új Írás*, 1985. november.

²⁵ Elhangzott a magyar Rádióban Ben Jonson halálának 300. évfordulója alkalmából 1937. augusztus 16-án. Megjelent: *Orpheus*, Szentkuthy Miklós különszám, 1994/1

az író nem csak szöveggel telenyomtatott papíros, hanem a történelem jelképes virága és gyümölcse, és teste, betegségei, emberi harcai épp oly művek, mint a versek vagy a drámák.”

Visszatérvén az angol irodalomhoz: Szentkuthy Miklós doktori tézisé is Ben Jonson munkáiból írta 1931-ben. Nagy ívű dolgozatot szeretett volna írni, de tudta, miként a papságot is legalább a püspökségnél kellene kezdenie, mert nem lenne türelme végigjárni a ranglétrát, az általa elképzelt dolgozatot tanárai nem fogadnák el. „Utált hazug disszertációm: adathalmaz, ill. idézethalmaz: az aggályosság visszataszító meddősége. Csak akkor tudok írni, ha minden szótagomat Ben Jonson egy szótagja igazolja. Filológiai haláltusa.” – írta naplójában²⁶ Fel is panaszolta dilemmáját az akkor éppen Londonban tartózkodó Szerb Antalnak,²⁷ aki 1930. május 17-én kelt levelében így biztatta: „De azért ne félj a szakdolgozattól: írd meg olyan rosszul, ahogy csak tudod – annál jobban fog tetszeni illetékes köröknek.”²⁸

Szentkuthy első rádióelőadását – Cs. Szabó László felkérésére – is az angol líráról írta.²⁹ Összefoglalójában eszményítő összefoglalást nyújtott: „Az angol líra [...] egyesíti magában egyrészt az álomszerű lebegést, a virágok sugallatának minden édességét, másrészt az emberies közelséget, a mindennap realitását, annak soha el nem mosható körvonalait.” Az angol líra azért izgalmas Szentkuthy számára, mert saját poétikai programját véli felismerni benne: az emberi közelség és a mitikus távolság lélektanilag szinte megmagyarázhatatlan harmonikus egybejárását, amit Shakespeare művében fedez fel. A realizmus és az álmodozás egymásra hangolódó angolos opalizálásának megértéséhez germán ellenpéldát hoz fel: „A németek számára mindig az egész természet létezik, mint nehézkes mítosz, biológiai végzet; tele van ingoványos bölcselkedéssel és profétikus furorral. Az angoloknál éppen ellenkezőleg: gyermeki és kertészkedő viszonyban vannak vele, a természet mint egész nem szerepel, de egy-egy hal, egy-egy furcsa bogró, egy-egy

²⁶ *Fájdalmak és titkok játéka. Naplójegyzetek és naplóillusztrációk 1925–1942.* Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2001. 78. o. 1930. december 14-i bejegyzés.

²⁷ Szerb Antal 1920–1924-es naplófeljegyzéseiből tudjuk, ő maga ugyanolyan kétközben volt a szakdolgozatával, mint később Szentkuthy, s ugyanazt a megoldást választotta, mint amit fiatalabb pályatársának javasolt. l. Szerb Antal *Naplójegyzetek (1914–1943)*. Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2001

²⁸ Szerb Antal levelei Szentkuthy Miklóshoz. Közreadja Tompa Mária. *Holmi*, 1994/1

²⁹ Az angol líra. Elhangzott 1936. szeptember 23., megjelent: *Lyukasóra*, 1993/1

boldogító szíriomszín érdekli ő ket. A *Szentivánéji álom* és a *Faust* ellentéte ez.” Shakespeare közelhajoló-eltávolodó, öntudatlan harmóniát teremtő poézisével szemben John Donne költészetét az élmény és a stílus kötéltnáchoz hasonlatos élet-halálharcaként elemzi, majd az angol humanizálásra, a világ emberi közelségbe hozására John Milton, „a nagy puritán és vak látó” *Elveszett paradicsomát* hozza fel, amelyben „Isten és az ördög, teremtés és megváltás lírai kérdésekké válnak: az egész protestáns hittudomány elhagyja a katedrát és a templomot, hogy Milton legegényibb, legotthonibb, legcsaládibb magánkérdései legyenek.” John Keats-et a legköltőibb költőnek nevezi, aki a költészetet egyetlen életlehetőségként élte meg, kiemeli William Blake sajátos angol őrülségét, Coleridge romantikus misztikáját, Shelley lebegő pillangócikázását, hogy végül a következőképpen összegezze az angol líráról 1936-ban megtartott rádióelőadását: „Angliában sohasem volt romantika: csak romantikusok. Angliában sohasem volt halálkultusz: az angol költők meghaltak.”

Tíz évvel később újra az angol líráról írt rádióelőadást, ugyancsak fölkerésre. A *Csoda és játékosság az angol irodalomban* című tanulmányt a Magyar Rádió nevében Schöppflin Gyula azzal utasította vissza, hogy a hallgatóközönség még nincsen azon a műveltségi színvonalon, hogy maradéktalanul megértené és elfogadná Szentkuthy véleményezését. A szerző végül 1946 októberében a Szabadegyetemen mondta el a szöveget. A tanulmány további sorsa is érdekes. Tompa Mária 1991-ben Lengyel Balázs kérésére elküldte a szöveget az *Újhold-Évkönyv* karácsonyi számába, de Lengyel Balázs is visszautasította a közlést. A tanulmány végül a *Holmi* 1993. áprilisi számában jelent meg.

Mi lehetett a kétszeri visszautasítás oka? Csupán találgatva gondolhatunk arra, hogy Szentkuthy nem akadémia stílusban, hanem a tanulmányait jellemző lezser bolondériával, teremtő komolytalansággal fogalmazott, és talán túl sokat foglalkozott a szabadság témakörével. A művészi játékosság kapcsán például, ami előtt értetlenül áll a közönség, azt mondja, hogy: „a szabadság az értelme! Azt formálom a világból, amit akarok, én vagyok az úr a csárdában, nem a flaskó. Ha én akarom, a jegenyefából perec lesz, és a lábtörlőből arkangyal. Kinek mi köze hozzá? Szabad vagyok, játszani akarok, minden ösztönöm erre hajt.” Meglátását Chesterton költészet-definíciójából vezeti le: „*Vígan dadogni az emberek és angyalok*

nyelvén, belepancsolni a félelmetes tudományokba, szemfényvesztőn kóklerkedni piramisokkal és oszlopokkal, úgy rugdosni a mindenség planétáit, mint a labdát: ez az az ő si vakmerőség és fölényes közöny, amelyet az emberi léleknek, akárcsak egy zsonglőrnek a narancshajigálás tudományát, mindörökre meg kell tartania. Ez az a táncoló bolondéria, amit egyébként egészségnek nevezünk”.

Az egyszerűséget, a bolondériát, a kacagtató mélyértelműséget, a hebehurgyaságnak tűnő filozofikusságot az angol irodalomban felfedező szerző ebben a tanulmányban is, akár az angol líráról szólóban, emlékeztet az angol és a germán alkat kettősségére: „Lehetetlen észre nem venni, hogy az angolok egyik nemzeti műfaja, a detektívregény is a játékos-fantaszikus világ része. A költőt halál, szerelem, pénz, igazság dolgai izgatják, de amíg a germánoknál ebből szakáll nő, vallás lesz, nehézkes rágódás, itt ez is csillogó tündéerkert: misztérium és humor és körúti szenzáció.”

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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Startling Dryness: Szentkuthy's *Black Renaissance*



Nicholas Birns

In Dante Alighieri's treatise on the vernacular languages, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, the great Florentine poet says something very odd. All the languages north and east of France and Italy stretching from the mouth of the

Danube, he says, came from the same source, and this can be measured by the fact that they all say “ion” for yes. Now, how Dante thought the English yes (or even ‘aye’) sounded like ‘ion’, except maybe in certain parts of Brooklyn in the 1950s, or how Hungarian “given,” which to anyone who hears it clearly is a different word than German “Jag,” is related, must remain a mystery. Equally so is how the Italian poet thought Hungarian was a permanent presence in Europe for millennia when the Hungarians had only arrived four or so centuries before he wrote. But Dante’s comments set the ground for the cultural anomaly Miklós Szentkuthy so coruscatingly explores in his breviary of *St. Orpheus* series: the way Hungarians are at once in Europe but not totally of it, and the way this anomaly enables Hungary to paradoxically be the seismic cockpit of Europe, rife with a cultural energy and sophistication that is only fueled by an awareness of its contradictions. In Szentkuthy’s era, the many lurchings of Europe towards barbaric self-destruction, the monstrous despotisms of Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, and their epigones, gave a sense that Europe’s seeming achievement of civilization was narrowly perched on a cesspool of barbarism into which it might relapse at any minute. Szentkuthy’s implied posture tweaks Benjamin’s famous aphorism that there is no document of civilization that is not also a document of barbarism; he seems to be saying, there is a difference between civilization and barbarism, but that civilization is still on a trial run, still having its kinks ironed out. In *Black Renaissance*, the second volume of his massive mega-treatise-cum-roman *flueve* called the *St. Orpheus Breviary*, Szentkuthy explores two infrequently examined but constitutive ironies of European civilization: that its sources are the only partially compatible legacies of Athens and Jerusalem (a paradox perfectly captured in the very idea of “St. Orpheus”), that its sources were about equally from the Byzantine East and the Latin Catholic West of the former Greco-Roman world, and that the very centuries in which European culture was solidified were also centuries of instability, barbarism, and histories which the mainstream Eurocentric really prefers to avoid. Associated

with this perhaps is the observation, made by many postcolonial scholars, that Eurocentrism as we know it is something only for export, to a New World “Creole nationalism” which needs a rhetoric of European superiority to intimidate the indigenous and non-white migrant populations. Szentkuthy in the heart of Europe can afford to regard the contradictions in the European legacy. Equally, often thinkers in Europe who distance themselves from their countries’ nationalisms, like Heine, are seen as toothless and overly cosmopolitan, the antithesis of a thinker too rooted in nationalism such as Herder; the unquestionably well-intentioned ‘good Europeanism’ of the later Nietzsche is, equally unquestionably, hyperbolic, as salutary as it is in warding off vulgar interpretations of Nietzsche, David Van Dusen aptly says:

It is not accidental, then, that he was thrilled by the expression of the 15th-century polymath, Nicolas of Cusa — who is later echoed by German Romantics like Novalis, English Romantics like Coleridge — that the essence of things is a *coincidentia oppositorum*: a ‘coincidence of opposites’. Szentkuthy is himself such a ‘coincidence’, and for what may appear to be a perfectly banal reason. Early critics hissed that he was ‘non-Magyar’, and with them, Szentkuthy regarded himself as a ‘European’ — by which he meant to say, and more on this shortly, a *contradiction*.¹

Yet there is perhaps one more twist here. Szentkuthy is incredibly cosmopolitan, but, as befits someone who changed his name from the German-sounding Pfisterer to the Hungarian-sounding Szentkuthy after Hungary had emerged as a distinct nation-state out of the former Hapsburg matrix, also indelibly Hungarian. As András Nagy points out, part of the difficulty of Szentkuthy’s digressive, allusive modernism is corollary with, or instantiatory of, the difficulty of writing in the language of the Magyars, a language again an alien at the heart of Europe. Szentkuthy is both doubling

¹ David Van Dusen, “All That Exists is the Only True Luxury,” *Los Angeles Review of Books* (May 2, 2013).

and indicating the 'inherent' difficulty of Hungarian in the sprawling, ruminative nuance of his prose.

II

The first paragraph of *Black Renaissance* throws down the gauntlet to the reader:

Saint Dunstan was a radiantly handsome young man, and his intelligence, his intellect, his cultivation were just as far-reachingly radiant. That duality, the feminine charm of an Adonis and the possession of the entire culture of those days (from Ireland to India), provoked very great and fateful inner battles within him. There was also another 'permanent crisis,' namely a struggle of old Celtic Christianity, luxuriating in pagan elements, and Roman, imperial modern Catholic, almost legally mandated state religion, in his soul and politics, for more than once he had a more regal role than that of the kings in tenth-century England. And a third dizzying swing of the pendulum playing out in his endlessly rich soul, embracing virtually every possible role in itself: his role as emperor and dictator in contrast to eremitism, the solitude, art, his unquenchable love and yearning for romantic forests.

We must ask: why Dunstan? We understand the "Saint" if we have read the first volume of the *Breviary, Marginalia on Casanova*, where Szentkuthy juxtaposes the libertine and the saint, the ascetic and what *Marginalia on Casanova* called the "wandering" of the eponymous hero. Like Nietzsche, Szentkuthy does not embrace historical Christianity, but unlike Nietzsche, he does not see it as superfluous either. But why Dunstan? As Szentkuthy says, Dunstan was a real historical figure in tenth-century England, someone who was in effect prime minister for a sizable amount of time, and who was the leading figure in the English (Anglo-Saxon) church of his day. The homosexual and Celtic elements are Szentkuthy's own innovations, and make Dunstan into a more sensual and rebellious figure, one whose relationship to

the Christianity he so zealously espouses is filled with struggle and contradiction. But why choose this saint?

The answer is simple. The key date in Szentkuthy's eccentric historiography is 1000 — the year Hungary converted to Christianity under the leadership of its king, St. Stephen (Szent István) and as guided by Pope Sylvester II. A later volume of the *Breviary*, indeed the one that marked the resumption in 1972 after a twenty-seven-year hiatus, is called *The Second Life of Sylvester II* and explicitly takes up the themes already evident in the Dunstan episode; indeed, as the Dunstan episode was appended to the edition of *Black Renaissance* Magvetö brought out in the late 1960s, the two were written more or less concurrently. When the reader sees Dunstan, we should also think of Sylvester. 1000 is the key date, and the elemental readerly move in the first section of *Black Renaissance* is to judge whether a reference made is to something before or after 1000; 1000 is the cardinal moment. If you measure things as they are before or after 1000 then you will get their place in the Szentkuthiann *Umwelt*. Thus Dunstan is important because, as (in Szentkuthy's view of him) a fervent though divided Christian just decades before 1000, he is a mirror for the Hungarian condition. As an Anglophile, Szentkuthy was on the hunt for English-Hungarian connections, for instance that Prince Edward, the father of the last Anglo-Saxon claimant, married the daughter of Sz. István and was exiled in Hungary for a while.

Szentkuthy is making the point that one cannot see England as the core of civilities, Hungary on the periphery, that England was going through cultural convulsions and contingencies at the same time the Hungarian state was being formed. Against Dante's paradigm, in which all languages exist in a steady state and the languages new to Europe are absorbed into timeless paradigms, Szentkuthy is indicating how contingent and even inchoate the now-established cultures of Western Europe were, and that to see Hungary as 'behind' them is a misperception.

But these English connections also had a modern valence for Szentkuthy. As *Black Renaissance* explicitly avows, the portrait of Dunstan was modeled on the fusion between the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic sensibilities found in the work of Szentkuthy's great elder contemporary John Cowper Powys (1872-1963). Szentkuthy's saying, of Dunstan's milieu, "In ... Christianity there was more paganism than people might imagine, but there was also more Christianity (nonetheless) than people imagine," is a quintessentially Powysian observation. Equally, the two other key historical figures in the first part of *Black Renaissance*, Tiberius and Theodora, are also borrowed from an English source, the historical novels of Robert Graves: *I, Claudius* (1934), for Tiberius (Tiberius was Claudius's uncle and his reign occupies a major portion of the novel) and *Count Belisarius* (1938) for Theodora. Szentkuthy admired and actually met Graves, and his use of Graves (and Powys) is not only important for Szentkuthy but underscores the way both these British writers represent an alternate yet still important part of modernism to the Joyce who Szentkuthy, both in his highly Joycean first novel *Prae*, and in his much later translation of *Ulysses*, so obviously admired.

But Szentkuthy was also, plain and simple, an Anglophile. Indeed, one is almost tempted to write a book about Hungary entitled *Anglophile Nation*. John Lukacs (who, since he considers himself an American writer, does not have the accent on his name as does his namesake Georg), in his autobiography *Confessions of An Original Sinner*, reveals himself not only as an Anglophile — growing up in 1930s Budapest where he spent his adolescence — but as somebody as up-to-date with the English scene as the lead reviewer for the *TLS* would have been, even as the storm clouds of war gathered all around him. It is wrong to assume, as I think the US intelligentsia has in a *fin-de-siècle* Vienna haze — that Hungary is part of seamless *Mitteleuropäisch* world where German is a *lingua franca*. In Klagenfurt, the capital of the Austrian state of Carinthia, I met in 2009 a Hungarian academic who I befriended partially on the basis of her, like me, not being comfortable

speaking the colloquial German that was the dominant language of the conference we were both attending. She had specialized in Russian and then English as her major foreign languages, a choice surely dictated by the Cold War and the realities of Soviet domination; but one could not picture somebody from Prague having German as *inutile* as my own. Whereas one can with some legitimacy see Finland as being dominated by the same cultural concerns as Sweden, albeit speaking a language of a different nature altogether, Hungary, despite its centuries of association with Austria, managed to preserve its cultural independence in such a way as to not simply be an appendage of the German-speaking world in a different linguistic vestment. Szentkuthy's Tiberius and Theodora are not only Gravesian but also above all *British*.

But why Tiberius and Theodora in the first place? Remember 1000 is cardinal. Tiberius was the Emperor of course at the time of Christ, and Szentkuthy's evocation of him takes this into account, as does all fiction on Tiberius, up to the late twentieth-century novels of Allan Massie (*Tiberius*) and Anthony Burgess (the highly underrated *Kingdom of the Wicked*). So Tiberius is, roughly, 1000 years back from 1000. And what of Theodora, the Byzantine empress of the mid-sixth century? She is of course 500 years back from 1000. Now, both personalities have other appeals to Szentkuthy: their mixture of power and sensuality, conscientiousness of governance and cruel authoritarian caprice — but the temporality is the key. Theodora, the empress of what Hungarians would call the *Keletrómai Birodalom* (Eastern Roman Empire), is in the middle of Hungary's relation to Christian time just as Hungary's Christian conversion in 1000 possesses mediality with respect to European civilization, which is both enabling and transgressive. Szentkuthy is *Mitteleuropäan* in *time* as well as in *space*. Hungary comes into Europe in the middle of its story, not just geographically but temporally *Mitteleuropäisch*. That is just what Dante could not or would not see, that the Hungarian language and sensibility is precisely not part of the steady-state Europe his

treatise implies and that certain Eurocentric visions would like to perpetuate. One sees this instance in this glorious quote from the first volume of the *Breviary*:

The whole Orient makes its appearance: after the Renaissance asceticism of Italy the peeling, ghetto-like Balkans, and on top of those two stages, now for the very first time, a third: Constantinople, Smyrna, Baghdad; Europe's adolescent apple — the enchanting East.

In this tableau Hungary is mediatorial both in space and time.

For all the daring and speculative erudition of the Dunstan-Tiberius-Theodora section, though, there are undoubtedly shoals around which the reader has to navigate. At his best, as in *Marginalia on Casanova*, Szentkuthy not only gives us an opulent tableau of the past but screens it through a filtering, interceptive authorial sensibility. With the Dunstan-Tiberius-Theodora section, though, this often seems missing and we just have an intelligent, sensitive person saying things that are extravagant and of course temporally splayed but that as comments about these figures are, if one knows of them, routine. Moreover they are designed to appeal to initiates, people who already know and sense the significance of the history. Indeed, Szentkuthy's mediations on Graves and Powys are almost like erudite and avant-garde affection, fired by enthusiasm and delectation of books he admires and the distant historical worlds they reveal but meaning so much more to the esoteric than exoteric reader. The reader, though, who perseveres to the second, Brunelleschi section will find a payoff, as the density, granularity, and specificity Szentkuthy has established with respect to history is involuted and applied, more interestingly, to aesthetic perception. Thus for all the apparent awkwardnesses of the first section there is a method to Szentkuthy's approach and the reader, again, should not give up. But the first section does indicate an important truth about Szentkuthy. Unlike so many Modernist writers, subject matter as such is important; whereas, at one extreme, Henry James would

insist that all subject-matter does not matter but only a perceiving mediatorial filter does; and, in the middle, figures like Walter Pater and Joris-Karl Huysmans, two writers who also took on Europe's long transition from antiquity through the Middle Ages to troubled modernity, but for whom they are always mediated by style. Furthermore, Szentkuthy does not really have dramatic situations, does not have characters, in a way that not only, obviously, Proust and Mann do but that drier and more essayistic writers like Musil and Sebald also have. Szentkuthy portrays people, but they are personalities, not characters: indeed, as he makes clear in the final section of *Black Renaissance*, Szentkuthy does not really believe in the individual person in the psychologistic sense. Yet he is intensely interested in the person as historically regarded and situated; indeed, in most of his books, he is a kind of wildcat biographer. During the period of harsh Communist censorship in Hungary, Szentkuthy turned to straight biographical fiction, as someone like Boris Eikhenbaum turned to biographical work on Tolstoy once the Stalinist monolith could no longer tolerate his earlier formalism, and in both, biography functions doubly, both as a seeming endorsement of official Communist historicism and as a subversive emphasis on the individual life creatively framed, adhering to no metaphysic either of history *or* individuality.

If we see the Szentkuthy of the Dunstan-Tiberius-Theodora section as more a biographer than a historian, we might find the sheer referentiality of it all less vexatious. Yes, Szentkuthy is at times professorial, getting the genealogy of the third-century Emperor Elagabalus exactly right, but for the non-uninterested reader failing to dramatize this compellingly. At times in the first section there are hints that the historical material are moments from a Monteverdi opera or operas; but we do not have Monteverdi as a Jamesian center of consciousness, just erudition that even if intelligently discerned is not necessary or in the first place artistic. But Szentkuthy needs, as an artist, to go through what for some readers might be an arduous journey, and the payoff is there in the next section, centering on Filippo Brunelleschi.

III

Why a black Renaissance? Though Szentkuthy is very conscious of the Asian elements in Europe (as a Hungarian would be, though at times he scorns those who reject Europe “only to blithely believe in Asia”). “Black” is not meant in the racial sense, but almost more as in the contemporary locution “black site”: something off-the-radar, *sub rosa*, *illicit* — the flip side of the official, neoclassicist, humanistic Renaissance. A more pessimistic Renaissance, a less officially classicist Renaissance, a more opulent one, one with medieval, Renaissance, baroque aspects, not simply rectilinear and perspectival? Szentkuthy brilliantly situates Brunelleschi as the hub of this: a more plural renaissance, more like the contemporary paradigm of the ‘early modern’ in the place of ‘Renaissance’ in academy criticism. One has to look at the Hungarian original: Hungarian is a language famous for its antitheses, and that between *Feber* and *Fekete*, white and black, is perhaps one of its most resonant. Black is not just not white; it is a positive polarity to white, inscrutable and delectable. Hungary’s own relation to the Renaissance — geographically proximate, far away removed in cultural situation (especially as Hungary was even in Brunelleschi’s time beginning to feel pressure from the Turks and the Austrians, despite valiantly resisting for perhaps a century more than people might have predicted) is also probative. The Hungarian word for Italy, *Olaszország*, means, (through its originally Germanic derivation), ‘foreign country,’ the other place, and even though the word does not have this valence in Hungarian, only in its original source, this ‘othered’ relationship is evident in the Brunelleschi section, as the blackness of his Renaissance is at once experienced by Szentkuthy as something ‘more Hungarian’ than the official schoolbook Renaissance, but also alluring in how other, how foreign, it seems to a Hungarian sensibility, in its intricacy and unfettered opulence — brought across exquisitely in Tim Wilkinson’s agile and erudite translation.

And, remember, we have to always think of the cardinal date of 1000. Where is the Renaissance? Roughly 50 years on. And where is Szentkuthy and where even are we? Roughly 500 years further on. So the framework of *Black Renaissance* is measured in five segments five hundred years apart from each other — Tiberius/Jesus, Theodora, Dunstan/Sylvester/Sz. István, Brunelleschi, Szentkuthy (us). For Szentkuthy, the Renaissance is the most glorious of all these medialities; but it is also, *pace* a monumental, creole-nationalist Great Books model, itself a mediality, not simply standing out as an unsurpassable superlative.

Yet Szentkuthy's treatment of the Renaissance avoids the potential pitfalls of the medieval section, with its overenthusiastic indulgence in period detail that might alienate the non-'fan' reader. Szentkuthy's treatment of Brunelleschi is steadier and deeper, and above all more aesthetic than historical. His technique is signaled by this remarkable paragraph:

I want to bore into the frescoes and statues of your villa to the very deepest of the inner meaninglessness of history. I want to formulate all my disappointments with startling dryness. Don't worry! The connoisseurs will in any case fail to notice my pessimism in the picture — my disillusionment finds expression in such abstract formal tricks that they will not suspect my confession behind it will not be suspected. This transport of the dead is an unforgettable historical lesson — all of that on an island: in a chosen nest of limitedness and narrow-mindedness. The blue of the lake, which is never blue but either white as milk or foggy or a transparent ultragreen, compiling mirror, lizard and Madonna: never endless but simply empty: that lake is also before him, sobered-up, cooled. (Is the masquerade I am making of Sixtus too simplistic? It could be — I must trust that the accumulated variations of sensitive whimsies elsewhere will compensate for the monotony of mania.) Is there anything lovelier than a balcony room opening onto such an empty white lake? Two beds with quilted coverlets, the large baptismal font of the washbasin, the oh-so-narrow Latin hardly-door, the balcony,

a sun-baked straw armchair, grilles in the big nothingness of water, sky and air, then nothingness, auroral mist, more mundane than all of Gardone's women put together.

Whereas the first section tries to formulate meaning in history, the black Renaissance of Brunelleschi finds at history's heart naught but its inner meaninglessness. Brunelleschi, in his design and applicability, will not alienate his customer, who will not on the immediate level be able to see the pessimism Brunelleschi has ingrained into his creations. For them, the surface prettiness will be all. But in Brunelleschi's own creative vision, the true coruscating loveliness is that of the blanched, etiolated white lake (remember the white-black, *Feher/Fekete* antithesis), an aesthetic so perfect it *becomes* mundane banality, even if the hedonists who use it do not notice. Life and death, inspiration and boredom mingle into a whorled, indelible composition. "Startling dryness": indeed could stand as Szentkuthy's aesthetic credo. His writing is essayistic, often even pedantic, but its goal is not to be magisterial but to be startling, even abrasive. We look to the spectacularly disruptive for aesthetic effect — in Szentkuthy's own era, Dada, Surrealism, Futurism, and Expressionism. But Szentkuthy's cerebral, deliberate dryness has its own quality to startle, perhaps all the more in that the superficial observer will have trouble seeing how startling it is unless they really plunge into it, whereas the one thing even the most doltish student of Dada, Surrealism, et al. can see is that there is an intent to startle. Szentkuthy demands intelligence from his readers. But it is not a mere intelligence, but one laced with esthetic awareness, and the ability to sense loveliness and fascination where it might least be expected.

The third section of the book accelerates this realization by breaking out into direct poetry; styled as a Monteverdi aria, this section releases the pressed lyricism that has accumulated in the previous hundred pages of exposition, and lets the imagination run wild, excavating and sounding out sepulchral chambers of consciousness and experience. This section is just

where it should be formally, like a scherzo in a Beethoven symphony, changing the pace and allowing the reader to register the full formal dimensions of the entire work. The fourth section, focusing on the Palazzo Grimani in Venice, intensifies the focus of the Brunelleschi section on architecture while also encompassing the contestation of the Mediterranean arena between Arab, Byzantine, and Western European influences, only belatedly settled by Venetian maritime prowess. The final section, with its long monologue of a tutor to Princess Elizabeth Tudor (the future Queen Elizabeth I) resumes the Hungary-England analogy, as well as indicating the English Renaissance, with its asymmetrical excellence in literature but not in art or music, as, in its unbalanced jaggedness, another kind of Black Renaissance. There is clearly however an allegory of art and power, and we must again remember Szentkuthy wrote in the age of the great totalitarianisms. Van Dusen intriguingly calls Szentkuthy someone with Nabokov potential (considering his considerable ability in writing English) but who chose to stay home even in a *dürftiger zeit*. Szentkuthy was not a dissident in the literal sense (and remember that, in the latter years of the Kádár regime, the ambience in Hungary was enough for Miklós Haraszti to call it a 'velvet prison,' which, whatever its exactions, is better than the iron cage of its other Soviet-bloc neighbors). But Szentkuthy was someone whose career and oeuvre were impacted by living in a Communist country; had he lived in the West, he would not have set aside the *Breviary* for so many years, though who knows what distinctively Western distractions might have made him veer away from it in a different mode?

Yet Elizabeth is not addressed as a potential tyrant but merely as a sort of captive audience who might have ears to hear much like Hugo von Hofmannsthal addressed Francis Bacon in his Chandos letter. She is addressed as an impressionable young woman whose tutor knows he is supposed to profess Christian doctrine, but who in fact lets her know of the Szentkuthian Christian-pagan mixture that, it is implied, will be the true,

animating spirit of the “Black Renaissance” of her reign. Elizabeth as addressee brings in a feminine element, also, and the sexual tension between tutor and charge adds a *souçon* of excitement to his labyrinthine instructions:

Don’t forget that only *one* saint functions for the human mind: relativism, understanding by that the unceasing scanning of reality, the excited feeling out of its criteria, and the greatest enemy of that is the idol, a Greek or Persian myth. Not because there are no gods and there are plants, but almost the reverse: there are no plants — *sed numina turbulentes adsunt*. Yes, ritual intercourse or the carving of phallus stones is such a hair-raising and ludicrous simplification of the divine reality of love as the number 5 is to a storm of five apples, five maidens, five seas, and five muslin shirts. It is incomprehensible that even clever evangelizers hounded the ‘modeling,’ the materiality, and the sperm-curse in Greek deities, yet this gallery of gods is the most pedantic store of ghosts of indifference to reality and denial of reality.

There is one saint — and in this wise the tutor is faithful to Christian orthodoxy — but it is irreducibly plural; the key is to acknowledge the graininess and variegation in the One rather than literalize them in a fetishization of the Many.

We might ask, though, why is this novelistic? Why did Szentkuthy clearly think of the *breviary* books as novels? After all, we have been accustomed today to reflective essays of a distinctly *Mitteleuropäisch* sensibility, musing about the dead empires of the past — Claudio Magris’ *Danube*, Roberto Calasso’s *The Ruin of Kasch*. Szentkuthy could have remained on the expository level and still been thought a genius, and if the choice of mode might have stanching the potential for sales, nothing Szentkuthy was ever going to do was going to be truly commercial. Szentkuthy does not so much depict characters as animate historical personalities. He explores sensibilities. Is it the speculative element, what these people might have thought, what these juxtapositions of historical consciousnesses and sensibilities might have been?

To this end, let us look at the stunning conclusion to *Black Renaissance*, the last words of the tutor's digressive and hortatory exposition:

The essence of the heresy known as the 'other person' is that it is always just a single portrait in a flash of a single historical second. Something which in any case cannot resemble Pharaoh's steeds and the tired-scented fruits of cypresses going back millennia — it is a solitary wonder which has no premises, the conclusion unknown.

Szentkuthy explores sensibilities, seeks a momentary spark, an *Augenblick*, of awareness and understanding which for him is the only true real, more psychological roundness (Szentkuthy seems to have had a Karl Kraus-like suspicion of Freud) being a false synthesis. Szentkuthy thus makes clear he does believe in the sort of characters who have traditionally been at the center of fiction: the figures with detailed biographies and thoroughly rendered inner lives at the heart of the fictions not only of a Hugo or a Tolstoy or a Dostoyevsky but a Proust or a Joyce or a Woolf. Why then call it fiction at all? Why does not he give up on the genre utterly?

Is it a counterfactual lament for possibilities latent in history but not actualized? Is the tableau given life by the authorial perspective within its manifestly modern and Hungarian concerns? Is this why Szentkuthy devotes his life to fiction still even after giving up on character and psychology? Why take this long creative road with only the authorial sensibility and biographically illumined personalities — rather than characters — as companions? Or is the central and only character Europe itself, stride, melancholy, at war with itself in a way even its brilliance cannot fathom, tethered to a history that at once nourishes and divides it? In the book's final image, the tutor of Elizabeth Tudor's directs her to look for, and be looked at, as a scintillating shard of insight rather than a full manifestation of subjectivity. So we should regard the possibility of an answer for the European dilemma that is the occasion for such serene agony on the part of Szentkuthy: — "it is a

solitary wonder which has no premises, the conclusion unknown.” History can provide the background for this; but the mystery is always, elusively, elsewhere.

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HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

BLACK RENAISSANCE¹

MIKLOS SZENTKUTHY

TRANSLATED BY TIM WILKINSON



Brunelleschi, Church of San Lorenzo, Florence (1422-1470).

(2) BRUNELLESCHI

Young Monteverdi's interest in Brunelleschi is linked to a stroll in Venice. His father once went near the Chiesa di San Moisè to visit a patient, and left little Claudio in the square in front of the church; he would come back for him in half an hour.

¹ Miklos Szentkuthy, *St. Orpheus Breviary, Vol. II: Black Renaissance*, tr. Tim Wilkinson (New York & Berlin: Contra Mundum Press, *forthcoming*).

Claudio could not have enough of the beauty of the façade; he had once heard something about it to the effect that it was ‘crowded’ and accumulated senseless Spanishness, but he could see that these words, when all was said and done, had no meaning there. True, the neighboring house had flat walls, and the church was full of flourishing protuberances, but those were rather just for touching, and the rendering of a bunch of baroque thingamajigs with the word ‘crowded’ was valid more for the blind who only worked with their fingers (it may even have originated from them) — the eye could hardly believe any of it. Claudio raced to the right in order to inspect it from there; then up onto the bridge, down the steps to the lagoon; he could not have enough of the games of the perspectives; he even darted over into the next street so as not to see it and that way perhaps enjoy it more. He lost his way when hiding himself in one such side street and all of a sudden found himself in front of San Salvador’s (the church of the Holy Savior). The main gate was open; moreover, a breeze was blowing the red curtain into big bulges; little Claudio could squeeze through without having to pull the seemingly hundredweight of drapery to one side with his tiny hands. He was just able to reach the font of holy water, but his fingertips could barely stretch as far as the water because when he traced the cross on his forehead all he could feel was his own familiar warmth, while the musty cellar odor of the water did not strike his nose. He slowly crept inwards, and after the initial customary church murkiness and tomb mustiness (*divinissimo gloriose impratorium illustrissima optimo maxime celeberrima unica div. reg. sien. venet. MMCCCCXXXIII*), he landed in a strange enchantment of lightness; a yellowish grey and alchemical draught of air coming from very high and from afar. He looked up. An oval cupola of unknown shape circled above his head with the speed of a swelling soap bubble.

In the egg shape there was a perpetual carbuncle composed of some mystic, wild yeast; he also fancied he could see vases going round between the knees of potters. Their color was also alluring; a sick butter yellow and candle tallow grey; every fresco without a sketch or internal division — only the lower edge was erased with a dark greyish-green shading into quite black.

Three cupolas came like that, one after the other, and when little Claudio, his eyes twisted up above the crown of his head, departed beneath them he felt the same magnetic upwards giddiness that a person feels in looking downwards from endless towers: there was something nauseating in

the twisting of the cupolas, in the color of withered grapes, the relentless alternation of black and white bands, the floating obscenity and unctuous nude-likeness. What was that? Was that simplicity? Puritanical form? Pure structure annihilating everything Gothic and baroque? Was that (he added fearfully as if he were uttering the name of the Antichrist in a spirit-summoning séance), was it — Florence? He immediately sensed the discomfort that he had felt in front of San Moisè. In the way that the ‘Spanish craziness’ there had shrunk into mignon, jewel-like, medallion-idyllic harmony (like, merely due to the cleanness of the weather and magic prismaticism of the dew, the million elements of a flower, which, its thousand pollen and vein reliefs notwithstanding, remains just a naïve dot in a meadow), but now the opposite: these superseding candle-colored ovals in pursuit of one another, the naked and distant cupolas, the black pillars which were supporting them and the movements of arcades more arrogant than a face by Girolamo Colleoni,² were not brought into harmony, a transparent mood of arithmetical crystallinity, but into the realm of violence, a Byzantine ascetic’s pose, dark Syrian sadism, and eternally reverberating cabalistic diagrams.

That is what Florence would be — he stammered to himself with superstitious certainty; he felt the muddle of animal longing and frantic fear that a child feels in front of the first woman he desires. He knew nothing of Florence, only the name Brunelleschi, about whom his father had spoken more than a few times.

At that time he did not as yet suspect something other than Venice could be so heart-stoppingly, stomach-churningly different. He staggered out one more time under the three cupolas: there was something wonderful in the fact that those three globular forms followed one *after* the other, in a straight line, above the squared base of the floor, and they did not intertwine into a grapey, Byzantine-Slavonic cluster of circles like the three Graces on every statue: they were not carried along in a collective circulation by that profusion of curves, embraces, and hint of rings which emanates from such a cupola like a gentle but constant eddy: they revolved separately, self-seekingly, in cold isolation, the snail dynamics of their independence cooled and enhanced by the consecutive soberness of the straight line. How nice the three degrees of

² Girolamo Colleoni (c. 1500-after 1555) spent most of his life in Italy and is mentioned by Vasari for a painting of the mystical *Marriage of Saint Catherine*, but after 1555 he worked for the Spanish king.

glimpsing them while passing underneath: first of all the lower, erased outline, with its huge dash, its vaulted freedom, a spaciousness of mirrors reminiscent of lakes in a park — then a step further on already the wall of the cupola as it kept on leaning inwards and ran round and round as if one's eyeball were the lost stone of a catapult speedily swung into action and due to the rotation I were to become flattened into the form of a pebble; then finally, when one has ended up right beneath it one glimpsed the pinnacle of the cupola, a tiny geometrical bud where the outside light spatters in. At that point Claudio saw *nothing* at all any longer of the neighboring cupola, and he did not even have to move on for everything to start over again. He had not felt that in the Byzantium of San Marco's in Venice: there the globular spaces of the cupolas also streamed into the lower regions of the church to such an extent that he had occasionally had the impression that beneath his feet was not a floor but hemispheres turned upside down to the upper cupolas like glasses, as if the upper ones were being mirrored in dark water.

Here, on the other hand, the church was strictly double-storied: for a start, the world of columns and Romanesque arches, and above them, quite unexpectedly, alien, like a marvel without any forewarning, the abstract-magical world of cupolas almost not of stone, nor even belonging to God. San Marco was a single big dark gold bough, an antediluvian fern with nowhere a stem or flower, or root, only tautologous vegetation; here the column part was misshapen, the cupola an *exotic* flower, an incomprehensible transparent marvel on the black body of the trunk. Naïve Claudio sensed in it something that was almost mockery, cynicism, heresy.

Hardly had he met up with his father, of course, than he immediately began pumping him about Brunelleschi; at first he thought he had also made the cupolas of San Salvador's; he asked for woodcuts, gossip, everything. His father promised that that very evening they would take a stroll over towards the Jewish quarter, and then he could point out one or two things in connection with Brunelleschi. Claudio settled down in his room with an even greater chaos in his head than there had been up till then. What could Florence (because for Monteverdi, as we have already said, Florence was both a proper name and the name of Brunelleschi's city) have to do with the Jewish quarter in Venice? He sought out the woodcuts of Florence in his own books but found none. On the other hand, time passed quickly because he had not even put his books back in order on their shelf when his father called in.

...Brunelleschi spent his childhood in the house of three aging women; his parents did not bother with him. The architect, who incidentally was reticent to the point of gloominess, always referred to them as the 'three Graces.' The young child did not make the acquaintance of adult males or girls; only the three crones! He actually made polychrome statues; virtually no one knows about those; they are in the possession of a wealthy but totally reclusive Venetian Jew; Claudio's father only knows about them because the old fossil was once a patient of his. He was about to go that way with Claudio so he could see the group of statues for himself. Claudio could scarcely contain his excitement — he would never have imagined the "Renaissance" would irrupt into his life in this way: magically revolving cupolas, a secret treasure of the Jewish quarter, and old dames.

The first of the Graces was the embodiment of puritanicalness; young Brunelleschi lived like in a Carthusian monastery. One is familiar with the families of such wealthy traders, at whose home every column is marble, every spoon pure gold, and the lady of the house does not sleep in anything but Belgian lace *schmattahs*, whereas the way of life, timetable, recreations, and relaxations pass by with such dreary mechanicalness from one day to the next that one feels one is constantly at a funeral. There was never a smile, never a superfluous word, nothing but measured paces; everything was just a number and a business profit turned into an abstraction. That is how he got to know the cold demon of money, the involuntary fakirism of bank materialism within the pomp: the lady of the house was always calculating — never greedily like an avaricious second-hand dealer's wife about bridges, nor even calmly like a feudal count doing his totting up with nonchalance, but with a cold unemotional obsession the way only women can, and even then most likely when the possibility of love has deserted them with a twilight flutter of wings.

How many times did young Brunelleschi creep into the black bank boudoir of the first Grace in order to examine the invoices, bills of exchange, and letters of credit: he understood not a word about them, of course, but he did know that the number were sources of life and death: due to those numbers the palace was so Veronesean illustrious, and owing to those very same numbers every female in the rooms, every single one, was world-weary, dead and menopausal. In that way, already in his childhood, Brunelleschi somehow became 'materialistic': to his dying day he was afraid of money, he got goose bumps if he had to walk in front of a bank because he knew that the

life-consuming prime mover of life was there. Naturally, he himself was never able to handle money; he was poor with no business sense, but he enquired continually about prices, currencies, and credits as his most feared enemies, who had filled his superstitious, cowardly imagination once and for all time.

Later, as he began to reach puberty, the banker's wife got bored of the boy, in whom to her deepest disgust (which of course was not betrayed by so much as a twitch of the face) she deemed to discern artistic inclinations and pushed him over to her elder sister. By then Brunelleschi was already a morose, lonely adolescent with a phobia for money, who had been unacquainted with freedom or play in his life, had learned from the ladies to despise men, the majority of whom slid into the filthy world of heroism, politics, and dreams without having grown to love the ideal of the fortune-minding woman. For a while his artistic disposition, keen on carving and painting, for a while rebelled against the ladies' puritanicalness, but he soon perceived that they were so completely the stronger that willy-nilly he, too, started to turn up his nose at and, prematurely blasé, to disdain and deride art.

It was an excruciating, ambiguous youth, and if, on a very rare occasion, quite by accident, he found himself among painters, he looked down his nose at their blazing imaginations, from the background of bank branches, and, being a stranger, walked out on these unfruitful individuals with their 'naïve dreams' (it wasn't money but, like I say, the *number* was power); if he languished in the female tabernacles of interest rates he felt he was, nevertheless, the child of the brush and burin as he remained forever a nonentity in business. The mistress of that house was the first of the Graces in the sculptural group in the Jew's possession.

Deathly pale; down-turned lips; violet eyes in big, black troughs; disheveled; black clothes; spreading Buddha belly. The symbol of the sick trader, who in desperation, out of unbounded cowardice and hypochondria, counted from dawn to dusk: out of his menopause-tortured eyes there may have shone a distant sobriety that had long been driven out by loneliness and fear stemming from living without male company. Young Claudio was gripped by the uncertain rapture of feeling adult when he saw that it was possible to seek in the rigor of Florence arcades and cupolas not symmetries fallen from heaven but also invoice-melancholy old dames: in the vaulting of San Salvador there was maybe more of a banker's wife's suppressed hypochondria than any Hellenic philosophy of art. The wrench into humanity was splendid child's

play, and Monteverdi, make no mistake, played with it until his death, not troubling much to make a secret about it.

But who, I wonder, just who, was the second lady (the Second Muse of the Renaissance as he now formulated it to himself in childish hypertrophy)? His father came to a halt by the rail of a small bridge; it seemed he did not wish to show his son first the Three Graces (that was how the secret Brunelleschi statue was referred to by those who knew about it) until he had sketched out to him a brief portrait of all three...

The second woman was silver-haired, a white head of curly, short locks, which angelically jumped all over the place: very much the eternal child, but without any true glee. She was demented, no doubt. She was always cocking her head to the right and left, like a seal popping up from the water and inanely orientating itself. An apparently jolly life went on there: guests came and went, a heap of gondolas rocked in front of gate like clumps of leaves which have dropped into the water in fall; music sounded, a ball was in progress — but it was all driven not by *joie de vivre* but by some jiggling pack of nonsense, a hurry-scurry, an agonizing snobbism.

What in the first house had been money darkened into abstract trembling — *pavor* — was here social life, the dreadful self-torture of parvenus, the 'keeping up,' was a complex, marrow-wasting arithmetic. Menu plans, seating orders, collecting of ranks: all of that with a suffocating speed, crazed impatience. It did not take the woeful-wild even three days to notice that as a matter of fact there was no difference between the first Grace and the second: just as there some abstract scheme had been the be all and end all (the 'value' bogey) of life, here too something similar was the case: the *mathesis* of rank, irrespective of the individual, pleasure or life. In vain was the first Acherontic banker a conscious, provocative anti-snob, and the second a grinning heraldry-nut: they remained the most fraternal of brothers in the *female* conspiracy of the culture of *abstraction*.

The Mercury who so joylessly, barrenly put on himself the make-up of the rotten feudal order had an appalling influence on the lonesome adolescent. Whereas the first 'Auntie' had been a big, paralyzed, underwater frog-fetish, the second was a white-peruked puppet with a painted smile who squirmed here and there, despite her barrel hips, all zigzags and mercurial restlessness: yet it was always possible to feel the wire; it was a machinery which would start

to bow and scrape that way in front of any scutcheon-scrap which drifted by like the figures of certain clockworks when the hands reach midnight or noon.

At that time period of life Brunelleschi often thought of suicide. What was the point of living? He felt nothing else in his own body other than the great predominance of its *vegetative* part and the redeeming anguish of individuality — yet the way he saw it only *abstraction* was worth anything: combinations of money or combinations of armorial bearings; no one cared about the person. Then the puppet died, and this big woman colossus who would suddenly grow quiet and flash a smile in bed scared him off his own death: he saw that in death it is precisely oneself who dies — to the skin; even a fly on one's skin lives on.

That was how he ended up with the third Grace. In point of fact she was a variant of the second: a mystic snob, a parvenu bloated into religious stupor. Whereas with the first one the fatness only manifested in a potbelly which drooped inorganically (an unfastened belt slackened hole by hole); with the second it was permanently creased into a huge chain of hills and valleys running across the whole body (it might have taken weeks for it all to level out flat in the sarcophagus); in the plumpness of the third this finally reached its classicism: the whole woman was a single gigantic ball of flesh with even her hair flattened very smoothly from her brow to the nape of the neck so that the snow-white body (naturally sometimes it had a rash of pimples here and there) might retain its perfect sphericalness. Here there were no belly and hands, heart and speech: there was just one and only one ball function, nothing else.

This woman in her younger days had been a court lady of the pope, now in his eighty-seventh year; later on the heir to the Spanish throne honored her likewise; afterwards the Duke of Milan married her, and when Brunelleschi landed up with her she was just on the third year of her widowhood. In the woman's soul, life, and household there was nothing but those two shadows: the pope's and the king of Spain's.

Brunelleschi made her acquaintance with her when the second Muse (the most pleasant of the three) was seriously ill. When the third saw that all hope for her sister living was gone and she was already wheezing unconsciously on the bed, she did not wait for death ("After all, an unconscious body would have no use of me sitting beside it, would it? It would have no *razón*," she added in Spanish as a heart-wrenching souvenir), but went home with the greatest indifference because the King of Naples, in heading to see the Pope,

had quartered himself in her house. Although recovery was not medically out of the question, she had already ordered the flowers there, but as a precaution she had allowed one of her dresses to be dyed black.

Brunelleschi, strictly speaking still a child, had never felt such deep loathing for a person, a woman, or life in general, as when he happened accidentally to be a witness to the flab-spiritualist's undressing; in point of fact she considered the dress she happened to have on would be the most suitable to wear for the eventual funeral. The amiable fool who died one was able to just tolerate somehow, even have some affection for, but one could not even look at this fanatical lump of dough. It was to her that Brunelleschi passed. A new element also made an appearance in the house: supercilious and theater Catholicism, diamond-studded crucifixes and cornelian Magdalenes, a domestic chapel fried in incense, mundane liturgies and holding confession circles. This is where Brunelleschi learned from a maid that Jewish blood from somewhere flowed in the veins of the three *Parcae*.

Young Monteverdi, who in his boyhood thought much more dramatically and more ariatically than later when all the arts preoccupied him, was already picturing glum adolescent Brunelleschi in vivid colors and words appearing at the Monteverdi family's Whitsuntide children's theatre — he pictured midnight, late-arriving guests in the house of the first, the catacomb banker's wife; everyone was sleeping, only little Bruno (let us call him that for short) is awake; he was listening to the drops from the flaming torches on the rear balcony as they were suddenly snuffed on hitting the waters of the Canale, and indeed a small group arrives in the moonless, starless night: an extremely delightful young married couple, virtually children; an aging humanist type (he had a book!), an armored stalwart, and a shriveled little Shylock skeleton.

Bruno does not awaken either the lady of the house or the valets — he placed the guests according to his own fancy: the young wife in his own room, the geriatric Jew in the attic.

(... In vain did I wait on my cramped balcony for moonbeams and the entrance of stars: the new Venus' or a shell's beater or, who can tell, a star-hungry sea had perhaps chased the Plough to the cypresses, and with it all the moons. But scarcely had I started to dispute with the selfish elements, like fairy-lake swan, than you came towards me, you barely tested *sponsa*,³ and you

³ A betrothed woman, bride.

brought in your hands, instead of star spangles, the whole world. I recognized Atlas, the Babylon of muscles, tortoises, and many elephants who carried the world in the palm of the hand and on their weary backs: but such a fragrant girl who in the gleam of a single strand of hair, the silk curve of a single little slipper, draws for me a Fate-opium secret: who could conceive such a happy miracle? Oh, at last, at last: the calculated light of staked candle bushes, and its shadow casts a planet's gossip-sketch on a flower, the ascetic's bed of my little room, glories these gifts of an apparition with fragrance...) Truly this is Bruno's finest night — the young husband he locked in a room in the tower as he was dreadfully sleepy anyway, so let him be left in peace.

Towards the morning, when he knew that the lady of the house was already up, he crept into the crypt of her bedroom and recounted about the guests: a bit tipsy from wine, lyricizing about his little wife, forgetting about the Jew bunged into the chimney. The time for a big turn of the hour-glass arrives: the married couple were poor relatives, they would have to be thrown out; the humanist — he was a fool; the soldier — awfully dangerous; but the rheumy second-hand dealer — he was to be put up in the best room (and I must learn once and for all time: every human face is just a goy lie; the love of girls is buffoon virtue; book learning is madhouse lunacy, and the many heroic swords are also free whimsy. I must learn to loath the sea because its blue nooks and crannies are just a proletarian romance; I must detest the dance of constellations because it makes me thirsty for dreams, dreams are a thousand plagues. Oh, my greatest pain right now is that it is not a big struggle to exchange my poetry. Did I not feel so boundary-hard when the garrulous torch brought this little bride that I will never have the strength for true joy; and what else is body-waxing destiny. For me it is just the word of an interlude — if it is a play for others, for me it is just a threadbare shadow of a game. Come, then, my crone witch-teacher, you have no idea in what fertile soil you showered your money scholasticism: how well the scar ointment of cursing sits tight on my kiss-cracked lips, and how speedily wines poured out for nuptials foam a '*Prosit!*'⁴ for second-hand dealers. Because my sole treasure, my shadow, my face is eternal foreignness: the dark acidity of my blood is always only 'anti' and 'contra' — for me in this battle to slap money's helmet on my head and

⁴ 'Cheers!'

address the antagonist as poor: it matters so little; for me my fate is killing, names do not reach me...)

Young Bruno thus ended up with the third sibling. In vain did the woman ready her mourning dress in advance: on the day of the funeral the King of Naples arrived at her place, so naturally she had to stay at home for him. In the king's escort there was a young man, or rather child, who had just as decisive an influence on Brunelleschi's whole life as the three *Parcae*, or rather summed up the macabre influences in an unexpected form.

This mongrel Spanish-Arab boy was the royal court's fortune-teller, stargazer, and mathematician. Bruno almost passed out when he saw him because the Sicilian Adonis could not be told apart from the young wife with whom he had once been so happy and whom he had had to eject from the house. After the banquet, Bruno and the boy went down into the garden and began to talk. Bruno had imagined stargazers were quite different: big, bearded old clowns, wearing trumpet-high fur caps, blind to all earthly matters, and at night spending their barren time with all kinds of hocus-pocus. But this one? That was the way Frederick II must have envisaged the anti-Jesus of the anti-Gospels.

He was a thin, bony boy with golden brown skin, black hair, and, unexpectedly, blue eyes. His whole handsomeness was sharp as a knife. He had no sense for poetry (as immediately transpired from the first greedy gout of adolescent dialogue) or women. The three old biddies put together were sentimental troubadours compared with this boy. His thinking alone was a Semitic Sahara; his body alone (already almost preposterous), European handsomeness. For him this Bruno's child's head had this non-self-contradictory duality that completely agitated him: he perceived in one individual every physical adornment of his midnight love and the dryness of the old crones who had cursed her away. He learned from the boy that he was going no further with the King of Naples because everyone, from the king himself to the last lady in waiting, was persecuting him with love. (... what a foolish bevy the royal household was pushing lips full of desire towards desire-blind lips — blind people, not suspecting the otherworldly Rule of Reason in which beauty had molded itself. If my cluster is the prey of twigs and birds in the deep bell-void of cypress shadows: it is not a love line into which my hair spins but celestial cycles and geometry, primordial proportion, which cannot be conquered by earthly girl or woman, only fair-unknowing Yahweh or blind

Pythagoras. As to what secret business excited Fate when a mask of beauty slipped onto my just-numbers being — I have no idea. Maybe as a lesson that one sees every now and then: the fairest beauty is nevertheless — an imago-less rule; the most voluptuous marriage is ‘barren’ *mathesis*. That is how I became and remain an Arab number-Adonis: my *virgo*-stimulus — the youth of knowledge, my Narcissus reflection in the world under occupation: pure geometry...) (In this way something absurd presents itself for the narrator, of course: the driest form-maniac has to draw a portrait of the most self- and world-agonizing Florentine person — via the child’s mind of a Venetian romantic musician — the development of a funerary, anti-aesthetic soul born almost out of vengeance in the language of Monteverdi’s lamentations of adolescence and aesthete *ariosos*: baroque killing in a baroque apologia.)

Young Bruno and the ‘Arab’ spent a lot of time together: the boy was the greatest love of Bruno’s life. During their excursions the Arab birds brought down birds with slingshots, strangled kittens, dissected flowers; Brunelleschi had not seen such cold-blooded destruction before. He saw that he could rip a person into shreds (himself, for instance) with the same cold-bloodedness. (... Ach! Could you have guessed that while, head hung down and dusty with indifference, I plodded towards you and after your horse in hunting deer: it was not an image of antlered deer which cavorted in my soul but the elasticity of your muscle which attracted me as in wild apertures it communicated its strengths among distant oaks. But I was a laughing stock, cowardly and sick of the world: there would not have been a more insolent heresy on Earth than if I had approached your cold beauty with the distorting desires of my abortive body. “Did you see the glimmer of the blood of its ankle?” you asked me in a shout, and while I forced out a strangled “Yes!” from my tightened throat: I was not getting drunk on the blood of perishing roe deer but I was clambering the lotuses of your blue eyes like a caterpillar pupating to a cocoon in the fall.

But what did you know of that? Even if you did know, you scorned it and threw it away like bits of gravel pricking the soles of the feet in sandals. Or did you perhaps see my yearning with your malicious eyes, and while you laughed as you tore the wings off budgerigars you mocked the feathers of my love to my face, sparing my real body out of pity? That’s how it was — like that, like that; what was the dreadful gymnastics of a squirrel on the spacious screen of tree branches besides the mournful tumbling of my death? You

plucked all my petals to shreds; your rabid dogs devoured me; you sprinkled my blood in a peasant shithole, and in the arrow interlarded heifer, like a misshapen icon, in a faithless corner, due to your youth I became a Saint Sebastian of love...)

Young Brunelleschi was later properly taught astronomy and mathematics by the Sicilian, yet outside the lessons as well the boy would only speak about those. And for Bruno in addition to disappointment in love a newer one was added: with the best will in the world he was unable to understand the Arab's lectures. He still adored him for his good looks, but out of envy he hated his knowledge. At that time no other subject preoccupied him besides Abraham's wish to sacrifice Isaac. Isaac was always the Arab, always bound and wounded in impossible poses by desperate Brunelleschi in his pictures and versions in clay — that was his way of gaining revenge.

He even showed these sadistic Aretino figurations to the mathematician, who with aristocratic nonchalance suggested even more cunning exaggerations for the altar and the whole gamut as he carried out his own idiosyncratic calculations of the permutations and variations of algebraic symbols for the human limbs and instruments of torture, and compared with those the lyrical love and lyrical vengeance which were at work in Bruno proved very shabby. Quite aside from the fact this was terribly exasperating for the young sculptor, he nevertheless used that subject to enter a competition for the design of the Gates of Paradise to the Baptistery (*Battistero*) of San Giovanni in Florence. He lost because like every mania, Bruno's, too, over time it lost its positive or negative sign; the Arab boy's subject of murder and death was simultaneously ideal and disgust, along with mathematics. How many were the times they sat together at the edge of woods beside their game bag of games, gazing at the stars, the sculptor myopically screwing up his eyes in superstitious fear, the Arab with ironic clarity like a straight line. He acquainted him with the infinite, absurd distances. Right away in that concept of distance Bruno felt a curious paradox, which occasionally stood out in his other thoughts about the stargazer and possibly was the most decisive influence in pushing him in the direction of becoming an architect. One of the stars was so remote that the light that we see now shows the state around the time of Christ's birth; if Bruno were now at the place of the star and he had eyesight of mythical acuity he would be able to see Jesus in the manger. That scene, therefore, was potentially present in the infinitely distant stars and

lights running at their tireless speed! As pure light, as vision projected by a line of beams into space, as a floating perspective.

The other constellation was already so far away, according to the Arab, that its light had set out when man was still as hairy as a bear, maybe there were not even separate males and females. Those calculations he wrote down in a book: Brunelleschi waited for bulky tomes but the whole thing was just three pages. Alongside that how ignominious any text. So there was a star that was witness to a still somewhat undifferentiated world; how differently he now saw his coolly lecturing, hundredfold fair friend. Finally, there are agglomerations, clouds, of millions and millions of stars the light of which had dawned in a prehistoric time before prehistoric time when plants, animals, and minerals were just a single wriggling bubble and even mere spermatid preludes of man were lacking.

This is where the paradox was most acute for Brunelleschi: on the one hand the antediluvian world was in labor in anarchic colors before his very eyes, while, on the other hand, the fact that the Arab adolescent had by way of numbers, geometric diagrams, and engineering design work had dizzied him to his dying day.

To each more elegant equation and numerological turning point the world linked a bigger chaos; to each more mystical chemistry of Creation — a more transparent, one might say more symmetrical, formula. The distances, the number, weight, and light intensity of the stars all so intensified that these masses beyond belief in their own absurdity became *abstract* in their own absurdity. The boy was also able to corroborate that impression scientifically (insofar as Brunelleschi, barely understanding mathematics as he did, was able to discern); he converted the infinite masses to forces (the forces to geometrical properties), so that at one and the same time he was able to see it as *material*-madness suffocating the universe and as transparent *geometrical* equation or notion.

The stars always played a role as points, as sources of light: at that time Brunelleschi dreamed with much more fanatical love about points than about the boy. The point was a symbolic marriage of mass and nothingness: of pure location, of the *locus mathematicus* and material, of the chaotic-vital something of the Creation, the *materia bergsonica*. It is worth pre-selecting these reveries from Brunelleschi's notebooks because an architectural consequence derived from each — a precise counterpart of even the most fantastic stellar

arithmetical memento can be traced in (not just read into) one column or another or cupola contour.

Brunelleschi drifted in relativity, in doubt; but this stellar relativity was regular, it had a strict algebraic composition; indeed (this is again very important), he sensed the radical *instability* of every material existence and every intellectual surmise, yet the *fixed* nature of the formulas of *mathesis* and the readily viewed models of geometry, as something which strictly coincided; only an arithmetically and geometrically extremely harmonious structure was able to make the eternal density of sophistication and illusion of being sensible for him, and also vice versa: only these logic diagrams insinuated the secret, the obscurity, the formless kernel of irrationality of the atoms of space, the stars, and thereby of atoms.

It was then that the average classicism which renders order with order, and the average romanticism which represents chaos with chaos, failed once and for all time in Brunelleschi, or if you prefer, in Florence, indeed in the whole Renaissance: this young sculptor, with demonic narrow-mindedness (under the influence of the Sicilian astrologer ephebe, of course), saw a hypersenseless and hypergeometrizable world, and he perceived those two, once and for all time, as an inseparable correlative. The expression of that duality is what in the Renaissance, above all in Florence, became commonplace; in pictures immense architectures encompass a relatively minimal group of humans — Christ's christening is covered with the most opulent refinement of engineering perspective by twenty-nave basilicas; for the advent of the Holy Spirit anti-graphic, non-Euclidean geometry is made graphic in an exciting scale of provocative contradictions; and Salome is only able to press her perverse kisses on John the Baptist's lips when a ten-story palace rises behind her hips, which an Einsteinian curving of space signals on a complicated model. Perspective, those areas of the drafting of projection, where relative and absolute, world illusion and precision of *raison*, meet in a mirroring that is inexpressible in words — monomaniacal Brunelleschi tapped that source of paradox, which yields both boundless thirst and boundless gratification, to spring forth, and he drank from it until his dying day (maybe the two sketchbooks of Jacopo Bellini⁵ indicate that mental state most

⁵ Painter Jacopo Bellini (1400-70) is best known as the father of Gentile (1429-1507) and Giovanni (1430-1516), and the father-in-law of Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506). One of his

tangibly). Great architecture, therefore, was not born out of stone, soil, and decorative or practical need, nor was it a continuation of Stonehenge. No, on the contrary, it was born out of the systems of lines inspired by abstract astronomy, out of the relative, or if you will: out of nothingness.

Philologically there is nothing more intriguing (*hic salta!*)⁶ than to read side by side the notebooks of that Arab boy (who incidentally died in Verona at the age of 27 years — some saying that was poisoned by Brunelleschi), which are in the archive of the city of Palermo (under the mark *Phil. Nat. D. XVI. a-f*), in which, with a bit of discreet license with the history of ideas, one can already divine in distorted form the most modern theories of the electron and models of an expanding universe — and the Florentine diaries containing the works of Brunelleschi's younger days plus the *canon juvenile* compiled by Coppia. One of the sentences of Ibn Athl-n'Othech (whence the oddly sounding latinized name of Io Atlantica for the young Arab, who otherwise, as we know already, was half Spanish by blood) runs as follows: "Space can itself spread, and the cosmic fogs are only to be considered as bundles of straw that float in space and are driven on by space waves. It is thereby shown to us wither world space flows just as the smoke of opium betrays what kind of draughts were moving about where in a room...." All the signs unmistakably indicate that the initial plans that Brunelleschi set down in the *canon juvenile* did *not* seek to set stones in space but sought simply to depict the internal waves of space itself. The way the role of stars and of world 'space' exchanged: stars were just a mathematically abstract state of space, and space became a quasi-living body so here as well: column, roof, wall, and cellar became nullities, and it was precisely the nothingness between which became architecture's sole theme. The first Brunelleschi sketches, with their circles, angles, and spirals can barely be distinguished from Kandinsky's readymade mumbo-jumbo.

In one of the drafts, for instance, one sees nothing more than a recumbent parabola the two branches of which fade into nothingness, the faint traces of green chalk in the space between them can be seen so that it is fair to assume that Brunelleschi imagined a lake here on one of whose sides would be

sketchbooks is in the British Museum, the other in the Louvre. He also painted portraits of Mehmed the Conqueror.

⁶ N.B. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta* (from the Latin version of Aesop's *Fables*): "Rhodes is here, here is where you jump!"

closed by a sharp oval frame, whereas the part which was left open would drop somewhere, probably in the form of a broadening waterfall, to a lower level of the park — and passing obliquely above this water parabola is a folding screen bent in a zigzag, a thin, tall plate, in every fold of which is a floating statue. That's all.

It is fortunate that Futurism was unaware of this codex, otherwise tragic Brunelleschi would also have been choked in the shameful comedy of being a 'forefather' of the new direction. The boundless openness of the parabola and its even-further-opening or still more the folding of the folding screen to the left and right in the air shows that it does not seek to be a building or shelter but an X-ray shot of the anatomy of space. The second drawing affirms the same: on one side are twelve tightly juxtaposed, undulating semicircle-cubicles, opposite it likewise, but *vis-à-vis* the latter series the wall is pulled by roughly one third further over, so that it starts later and then stirs up its half bubbles in the air a good deal further.

A bench is running along the length of the wall, water in front of the second; above the wall accompanied by water, supported by a thin lance, is a flat lamina roof, whereas there is nothing, open sky, above the wall accompanied by a bench. Here too the tendency is chewed in the viewer's mouth: not circumscribed, just popping out of out of space by accident, and again to create a structure streaming back into space.

All these, it should be emphasized, when it comes down to it, are the products of vulgar and infantile adolescent inspirations and adolescent misunderstandings, but equally it should be emphasized that, after all, even the soberest old dodderers of the Renaissance also moved around that infantilism. However once learned the lesson in the history of ideas that the Renaissance was not a revolution but only a varied Gothic and an insignificant presto prelude to the baroque, merely an 'intermezzo from Florence' and a '*pastiche éphémère*': if one looks at Brunelleschi's mental development, even today that unquestionably seems like frightening, bloody revolution, a self-tormenting hysteria of abstraction — one only has to stroll with open eyes along any of the streets in Florence.

Brunelleschi was also accustomed by Io Atlantica to the idea that after the infinitesimally small, both logically and physically alike, comes the infinitely large, without any transition, and *vice versa*: the orbit of the universe comes to the orbits of the electron, and after the infinite mass of all the Coma

Berenices and Umbra Ledaes — the weight of a sliver of negative material, an almost fictive photon. We have not one but the whole bunch of drawings here, again in that *enfant terrible* manner that has no leaning to a good word, he is seeking to express that minimum-maximum vibration.

A plan for a well, for example, which incidentally has the historical interest that it was prepared for the Pazzi family: the ground plan for the well is three circles that intersect in cloverleaf fashion, the marble wall of which is eight feet tall, completely smooth — above in the center of each circle, stands the slim figure of one of the Graces (in their own *calcule* thinness they better express the abstract life of the three old dames of his own childhood than they do the naturalist caricatures in the Jew's possession). Behind the first circle, in conspicuous proximity, rises a huge semicircle parallel with the circle of the well as if the small leaf of the cloverleaf were a projection of an enormous shadow.

The second well circle also has a wall projection — albeit for one thing no longer so parallel (it is much more oval); for another thing it is not so close as it bends away from the well. The folding screen transposition belonging to the third circle shows a curved form only at the very start, its other end is quite straight, running completely away from the well almost into infinity — which is also signaled by the fact that it does not end in the same plane but horizontally with steel rods running parallel in space in the way that at the end of a cloth the strands running in one direction often fray in the air. The well is narrow, massive, closed like a stone-deaf atom — its projection being world space itself: this endless screen is as much its mathematical shadow and its uncategorizable opposite, a refutation of the small fountain. In a letter Brunelleschi once cited *Io Atlantica* word for word, after which (from the viewpoint of his art) he made the interesting observation from which his entire anguished adolescent world shines out.

The quotation (by the way eerily accurate down to the punctuation marks) is: "... since space is the kind of thing we ourselves have constructed for ourselves so its waves and bends or, if it comes to that, its non-waviness and non-bendedness depend exclusively on whether we wish this or that, or rather on whether we wish to take ownership of a flexible or a non-flexible space..." The remark thrown in subsequently in agitated handwriting is this: "Five minutes ago the positive noise of the formulae proved to me that streams or kinks in space are just as real as currents in the sea or the rounding of the skin

of apricots. And now this posh doubt..." The exciting bit starts at the place that we have drafts of two frescoes which illustrate that frantic wavering between completely relativity and the completely absolute — the world as an arbitrary but manageable fiction, a subjective formula, and the world as a once-and-for-all-time ready objective reality: the two poles juggled into each other by the Arab boy.

One of the pictures is the Temple of Janus, the other the Birth of Eve. The former depicts without a façade a very long basilica that flows into the depths of the picture and at the end of which stands a figure of Janus on a low pedestal. The adolescently weak and fairly unscreamingly funny joke, because it was overcomplicated, starts from the point that everything visible on the left wall, either as geometric rigor or miniaturist naturalism, is thrown back on the right wall as in a distorting mirror, is tripled and elongated; what was kaleidoscopic becomes monochrome, a boy becomes a girl, Venus is bearded — a great madhouse of Gothic relativism. Under that is a comment: "... well, it could be that the natural law is just a metaphor of my nightmares, which may be exchanged for another at any time, should changed fashion so desire, — though it could be that the natural law is everlasting and something which does not exist in me but in the objects of the world, inside, like a skeleton within flesh...?"

The Eve fresco has the same concern. The Eve separating from Adam's body is nothing other than a transformation of the real Adam into a hypothetical Adam — and the possibility that Adam is not full-blown reality but a whimsical notion, a fiction, temporary in the most far-reaching sense, Eve is not even a woman in this fresco (perhaps the Arab boys' pre-sex world concept was also working in Brunelleschi), but Adam once more in a pale silhouette form: the major key of certainty in the minor key of uncertainty.

But that this '*abstractio pathologica*' can be derived from unbridled vitality as that piquancy can be derived from schematic unbridled geometrism is magnificently corroborated by a letter of Brunelleschi's. One of the snobbish members of the Pazzi house sent him Book 1 of the *Histories* of Herodotus, entitled *Clio*, for him to illustrate with a cycle of pictures. That was the first commission for the young artist, who for the time being had not trained himself to be anything other than an anti-artist, and his joy over the first task manifested no so much in the finished works but as in the lyrical voracity with which he detailed to the flexible snob his struggle with the subject.

“... I shall without fail paint the way the Phœnicians bore off Io, the daughter of the king of Argos.

Should I paint it? Is not the vision that the whining traders, the truly red notion of the Red Sea, the automatic identification of Io the Argive with the mythological Io, the transportation to Egypt of women who had been seized, the throwing of Greek and Persian, Jewish and Nilotic forms of art, the throwing into a gaily colored rag fair grave: was that truly artistic, I wonder, and not simple *joie de vivre*, the finest and most deceptive dowry that we brought with us from the dark of the womb? Everything that I see appears before me in some frantic, suffocating, and idolizing clarity.

I am the slackening of the oarsmen at the shore, the bargain turning impatient sputters in my mouth, the makeshift bridge on which the king's daughter descends onto the second-hand dealer's boat buckles easily in my knees, the cloud which surrounded Io is my breathing, I am the golden red, war-ruddy light in which I condense all this; the Mede, Persian, and Assyrian reflex in Greek culture: that is my only instinctive instinct, sex, divinity, eating and drinking being just pale experiments beside that — I see the past with such sharpness and liveliness of detail that I am on the verge of swooning when I feel, nevertheless, that I am not Io, not a second-hand dealer, not a Red Sea but a Florentine designate-fool. The change comes now: it is clearer than daylight that this seeing of the past standing on a detail-lavish, religious, mantic grade can be expressed with *non-accumulative*, Gothic miniature but, on the contrary, with a simplicity which is already beyond simplicity, with such an absurd reduction, which intimates and flourishes its veil around zero degrees like the rings round Saturn. For what reason? Because only the *elements* act on me, the burning, single-element core of substances — and because that can only be a tragic, resigned, defiant and vindictive art given that it perpetually remembers that its sole *raison d'être*, the *identification living* on all other and long-past lives must be forgotten, it must be left unsatisfied, until one's dying day. That is terrible.

That Io, in a momentary clearing in the time jungle of millennia, never knew in her life, nor can she ever, that a later Florentine boy would pervade her flesh, her shadow, her flood, and her kiss in the depths of the ark with such intensity that he would renounce it if he really could be Io as nothing was lacking from that, only a 'transcendental click.' And I shall die, I shall be reduced to nothing, the sense of my whole life, this maddening closeness of

fantasy to the reality of flowers, women, and boats will be even more definitively sterile and senseless than now. This boundless melancholy, deeply filling all my fleeting indentations, that the essence of my life is radically sterile — that must be expressed by art in the form of revenge-mourning. The Red Sea? A layer of red gloss on the wall, nothing more. This is a basic element, an *aqua aquissima*, an intoxicating essence of water, water where it is the most watery and thus sensual art, lecher and not philosophical, and besides that defiance: with one gesture the tidal flood which stimulates one to a million analyses of detail turns with a single gesture — into an inferno of nothingness. Just not analysis: this poor evasion of detail, the most Judas kiss in reality. So what is the minimum of that minimum that will be a worthy partner in my fresco of that maximum of imagination in which I tumbled on my first reading of *Clio*? A red plane; out of the ship just the contour of a fish; the oarsmen and sails are superfluous; out of Io, whom Jupiter surrounds with mist, I am in any case unable to cut that idea of mist, so that she will be mist: I shall paint a nude at one edge of the picture, but only in the form of a grey fragment of a shadow; the traders will be represented by a few jugs, strings of pearls, and ends of silk. In other words, the whole will no longer be a picture but, if you will, an Egyptian hieroglyph, or if you will, a concept of Gothic armorial bearings.

But is there a more life-fermenting art than heraldry? Simultaneously both more resigned and more evocative? The court ladies all escaped, only Io and a few others stayed on the boat. Can you not hear the women screaming, the sailors whooppeeing it up; do you not see the grimaces and clothes of every single Greek girl, the pattering of blondes and the black-haired between the hawsers; or the chained-up galley-slave oarsmen in the water, who are applauding the unexpected comedy with the clanking of their chains? The solemn and stupid king of the Argives under a tall baldachin as he would like, at one and the same time, to somersault into the water after his daughter and to retain his statue-stony dignity — you see all that, all of that both you and I would like *to be* above all else: instead of which I will send you a statue of ten running women, ten identical women, in an identical stride, because the running is what, after all, is important in the whole game, and since the analytic picture is the crummiest compromise between extreme reduction and full reality.

Believe me, Pazzi, my friend, it is a sublime and eerie moment when an artist renounces analysis for good, i.e., in point of fact everything which excites

him. But for anyone who likes reality above all else analysis is just a momentary adolescent illusion: his disconsolation will soon drive him into suicidal puritanicalness, into that strict world of hallmarks of substance hallmarking and allusions in which Arab abstraction and European greed for life are indistinguishable. Classicism? Renaissance? Selection? Simplicity? What rotten hit tunes. What is in question is something a lot more funereal, more disconsolate, the eternal impotence of fantasy — that is my *rinascimento*.

I shall also paint for you Gyges and Candaules, possibly one of the finest subjects. If I consider the curtain that hangs behind the queen's bed to be red where there does not have to be any difference between it and the Red Sea — a wave of the waters and a wrinkle of velvets, horizontal water and vertical curtain are insignificant differences in the resonant community of red and the 'object.' But if that is an exaggeration, in the end it is possible to portray all sorts of curtain variants. Not long ago I was in a theatre; nothing else appealed to me than that the curtain in front of the stage started by the ceiling and then reached down right to the ground, right down to the soles of the musicians, and both to the right and to the left it completely filled the room; nor was it the narrowest architecture in the world: yes, that curtain was an 'absolute' curtain. The Gyges story, by the way, not in its pictorial parts but its moral content is as elementally simple as I now want from all things. The nakedness of the woman herself.

This changing into a nude is not erotic, not spiritual, nor gourmet; a nakedness far from aesthetics, from everything: the nudity of nudity itself, denying Venus, Praxiteles, Hippocrates and mankind. Can you guess what I am thinking about? This woman is not a wife, not a lover, not a source of religious inspiration, not a birth machine, not a matter of metaphors, not a body for the king but 'beauty,' in such an asexual, indeed, non-aesthetic barbarity that it could be a symbol of that madness for the minimum which has got me in its power. In Mrs. Candaules' nakedness a most fakir-like *abstraction* and a *hyper-corporeality* more poisonous than opium finally encounter: she, and only she, can be the patron saint of the Renaissance's Janus. That, true enough, that is the relationship of men and women *à la manière du pauvre* Brunelleschi: there are no genital bodily capers, no Christian marriage, no physical beauty, no child and psychological goldfish scramble — no, only the formula of all those has remained. It could be this bores you rigid, my dear friend, that it happens to be the death program of simplification I am

proclaiming with infinitely many words, but the birth of any thought is mucky. Slap-bang by the entrance stands a chair...

This fragmentary sentence speaks to me more tragically than a trumpet at the Last Judgment. It is as if St. John were to say: *in principio erat* chair.⁷ No object drifted in space so solitarily and in such royal singularity as that chair. A chair: long before the Creation of the world. To paint a chair like that! Who would be able to express the infinite surplus and richness that inhere in that cosmically orphan chair as against an overcrowded, perfume-stenchy boudoir. If the woman is the barbarian anti-Eros, then the chair on which she will place her clothes is hyper-Eros itself. It is standing 'slap-bang' by the wall writes Herodotus, and in this thoughtless little attributive are amatory intimacy, all refined Bengal lights of within-*gynaikeion* being-inside. "One after the other the way she will remove them": there is more pornography in that specification than in all the French dives combined.

That is the important thing: the re-dedication of objects as objects again. The convergence of rite and the banal reflex movement. What is undressing? An entire human life. A drama of nude and blouse: a drama of the abiding animal and abiding culture; that of sensuality and of being set in the grave, of poverty and royal palace; a drama of instinct and mask, material and spirit, atheism and *civitas dei* — community of god... But no, no! If I carry on like this don't let the bad trap of simplification to extremes of the most naïve movements be ritual simplicity, let it not be full of religious, lyrical, or philosophical 'meaning' — let it not have 'significance' — let not the nude be 'life,' let not the blouse be 'civilization,' because the symbolism is already bad baroque, a source of loathing. The permanent hazard of this heraldic simplicity, a dancing on eggs — its meaning can be too broad, too ritual, hence it leads into the disgusting swamps of 'eternal humanity' and 'mythical completeness'; or, on the other hand, it is too tight, too little right to the point of meaninglessness — but even that is nobler. The 'seat,' therefore, onto which Candaules' wife throws her clothes, one after the other, — let it not be the 'eternal seat,' because that is already a cesspit myth, but let it be a momentary seat, by chance a chair right now — do not let the simplification at any price be a common denominator.

⁷ The first verse in the Gospel of John reads: "*In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum...*" ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...").

If Plato conceives an ideal seat, then the simplification of that is ceremonial, sacred, transfigured simplicity is complete with the vaudeville sorcery and pose of the 'essence,' that is to say a simplisticism which is worse than the decorations of a thousand shady religions: the way I picture the simplicity of a solitary chair is the simplicity of being cleaned out of everything, not the philosophical indecency of pointing to the 'essence,' but the poverty of a robbed person, the skeleton of desperation, removal of leaves, an ignominious tragicomedy of the object nature of an object.

Oh, my friend, don't believe that these differentiations are the idle finesses of an anxiety to play — no, I can declare with the triumphant melancholy of self-conceit that in these 'unhealthy' struggles is born a robust health of art. Somehow I also sensed mathematically in advance: if my frescoes and buildings were going to accomplish the *non plus ultra* of simplicity, then the thoughts from which these done-to-death cortiles were born, can only be full of sophistic folds, qualms spinning between abstractions. Just as I am convinced that the essence of the visual arts is sadistic simplification, so I am convinced that the essence of thinking is grubby sporulation, total morass: thinking like that can never be easy as its essence is impossibility; to acquaint oneself with the world is not ability, a wriggling negative...

How fine the alternative that the woman sets before Gyges when he learns that he had seen her naked — either he is to kill her husband or himself. Gyges kills her husband. In that case nakedness triumphed without Eros and sensuality; a murdering sword was flourished without hatred and vengeance. That is my world: that is the only purity that I feel is pure. You are in front of God, dotard Brunelleschi would still like to recount once what two kinds of morality he worked in life: one highly strung, *pleureux* to simplicity, perhaps even evangelical — and that is the second, that is the psyche-trampler, that is the value-denying, animal-apologizing where deeds are born from smelly motive-dungs, they are not driven by a Christian will or its stoic ally, they do not run into filthy nets of goals, however they also avoid the empty and mendacious dynamic on 'instinctive life' — simply deeds, functions, and algebraic deductions that neither classical intelligence nor romantic spontaneity can demand for itself. When Gyges killed the king he did not shed any tears; he neither grieved nor did he gloat, but he got his blacksmiths to cast a pile of golden and silver goblets and vessels, and he laid them in a line on the Delphic shrine as a sacrificial gift.

Do you know what that means for me, Pazzi? One thousand gold tankards: instead of psychology and morality. You can sense those three magnificent sounds in that Asia Minor scale: the nude without sex; the bloody deed without anger; and finally vase madness instead of 'spiritual life' or an instinct hurdy-gurdy? Do you know I sketched thick notebooks full for you in order to assemble a series of Gyges-style goblets as a stone ornament for your villa garden, the book of Renaissance morality engraved in stone, a new Ten Commandments of *de*-humanization? (Morality, morality — Brunelleschi bathes here with perverse pleasure and really and truly; I am a moralist, a moralist.) Imagine a tall wall; on it not a trace of decoration or articulation, up above thirteen huge monotonous vases with an inscription of the kind "Gyges instead of psyche." Or a detour and intersecting constellation for the walls, with amphorae of various sizes and colors at their feet and on their edges? You may choose, I have prepared a vast range of versions — circles, spirals, a recumbent 'S' from triangular walls, from miniature vases and from vases three times higher than the wall. There are tube-thin vases and bagpipe-bloated ones, plate-flat and lasso-eared ones — Brunelleschi was drunk, and he is drunk now if he thinks of these combinations.

Envisage their shadows; or the whiteness of the sun on their whiteness; envisage their dialogues with mirror-flat or frothing waters; their shadows among cypresses or frayed lime trees. Can my youth have a more agreeable and more expressive work than this Delphi furnished by Gyges? A marvelous place, that Delphi — partly made up of vases, golden eccentricities, and cornelian dressing cases, or in other words, inanimate objects; on the other hand, a jabbering prophetess, a mysterious elegiac couplet-automaton, and nonsensical hocus-pocus. Nowadays Florence is comprised of human bodies and souls on the basis of an accord between high scholasticism and petty bourgeoisie, whereas at Delphi the human 'body' is lost and in the great and mute triumph of the inanimate object, the vases, and the human 'soul,' logically runs on in Pythia, i.e., in opium chaos, in sleep, in ridiculous madness and in sick falsehood.

To Delphi, Pazzi, quickly to Delphi! Did I not map out Delphi to you beforehand when I said my life is composed of two parts: the extreme purity of architecture and the extreme muckiness of thought. What is architecture within me if not Gyges' expiatory vases? What is thought within me if not the mendacity and madness of Pythia? Delphi is the capital city of pessimism, I

say; let us hurry there, dear Pazzi, if you want some sort of *Rinascimento* with me. By the way, if you don't mind, I would like to paint an enormous picture on one of the vases: a portrait of you and me. Myself as Adrastus,⁸ the Argive king, you as the young son of Croesus.

I'll tell you why.

Adrastus was a royal scion, the son of the king of Phrygia, who unwittingly killed his elder brother and fled to the court of Croesus, going to Lydia in order to do penance. His entire life was consummated with that fateful guilt conscience, contrition itself, darkness of memory; in vain did the smoke of Lydia envelop his yellow body, it remained forever a senseless death. How well that role suits me! Just like wandering Cain. I see him as on the right condescending, mundane Croesus, on the left a naked priestess accompanies him with a polite smile towards the penitential altar, but he is barely able to stand on his feet, his dark blue hair falls on his chest, the whole of his body is the shadow of a *mètèque* — a metic.⁹ Because that is the main thing: he seeks the expiatory sacrifice in Lydia, on foreign soil, like a foreigner looks for medicinal baths or the climate; Lydia was probably the nation with the most famed industry for forgiving sins. But Adrastus, it seems, did not succeed in freeing himself from his soul — he is the unchristenable original sin, he is Brunelleschi. And his partner, Pazzi, the king's son? Don't take it amiss, my dear customer — he, too, is betrothed to death. Croesus dreamed that his son, Atys, would be killed when young by a spear. I perpetually see around your body a sword and poison, these little cosmetic instruments of politics and history.

Croesus keeps the boy far away from weapons; he bestows on him a harem and wife, he becomes a weakling more translucent than alabaster — his whole body no more than a cobweb, a few pips at the bottom for others. Don't think that is a satirical caricature, a critique. No, it is simply taking youth's healthy, natural repletion with death *ad absurdum*. How splendid are those figures condemned to death — the morals-metic and the Thanatos gigolo. Incidentally, wild associations of ideas were also evoked within me by the fact that the Phrygian penitent was the nephew of a man by the name of Midas, the

⁸ This particular Adrastus was the son of Gordias, king of Phrygia, and features prominently in Herodotus's narrative of King Croesus of Lydia. The Argive also links him to the mythical Adrastus in *Seven Against Thebes*.

⁹ A resident alien in a Greek city.

son of Gordias — imagine all the barren gold, the autumnal boughs on Byzantine mosaic backgrounds behind the figure of the penitent. Adrastus accidentally killed the youth on a hunt. I almost climbed a wall in my delight as an artist when Herodotus writes that they set off with selected youths and dogs. Youths and dogs. The king's son alone is slim as a whippet skeleton, and there he is in the middle of the pack just like a woman, like Artemis herself. What a picture! On the left the harem's pushy ladies, Lydian snakes, Lydian fishwives, Lydian poppies, Lydian sibyls, and beside them, indeed among them, mixed up in them: the ticklish waves of canines; you, young Artemis-Pazzi, as it were, float in this sea of harems and dogs, a stray fall leaf in the billows of the swollen river.

The background and upper part of the picture is forest — with wild Germanic foliage, not with the barbed-wire cell-nature of Tuscany. Quite far off, in a small clearing of the Germanic superstition flora, can be seen my own bent figure — an arrow being sharpened by Adrastus, who will later kill the inebriated prince. Whether I imagine your fate as being to become a victim of politics or I paint you on a vase — both are equally lethal. Death here is not something lyrical or tragic; it is not fall and not a Gorgon joke, neither Christian nor a Greek scholarly scam but an uncommentable point, nothing more. Everything inside me that evolved under the influence of the three old dames and the Arab mathematician has your loan of Herodotus to thank for its final crystallization.

Herodotus is not history, not epic: Herodotus is picture, and Herodotus morality. If the catalogue of my plans tires you, throw it away; but I, my customer, am obliged to lay out on the counter the selection that I can offer you.

I would like to paint on the ceiling of the domestic chapel a fresco depicting the excavations carried out by Pisistratus on the sacred island of Delos. For on Delos that Greek potentate announced a grand 'purification,' as prescribed by celestial portents, and he dug up the dead from the area around the temple and had them transported to quite another region. That is a topic! Resurrectionless resurrection, the hellish parade of "I don't believe in the resurrection of the body" — all in a marvelous Delian landscape, a heap of previously dug-up dead bodies amid palms and parrots; carried in the arms of slaves like the abducted Sabine women; Hellene floozies on Saracen shoulders,

Greek sages carried in the arms of Persian soldiers, Thracian despots on the backs of Jewish stall-keepers. Is that picture not to your taste?

I want to bore into the frescoes and statues of your villa to the very deepest of the inner meaninglessness of history. I want to formulate all my disappointments with startling dryness. Don't worry! The connoisseurs will in any case fail to notice my pessimism in the picture — my disillusionment finds expression in such abstract formal tricks that they will not suspect my confession. This transport of the dead is an unforgettable historical lesson — all of that on an island: in a chosen nest of limitedness and narrow-mindedness.

This penultimate judgment will be a caricature of metaphysics and the philosophy of history.

It would also be possible to paint midnight: the corpses would gleam amid huge shadow spokes under the firebrands of torches, but I want it at noon, with a lot of flowers, blue water, sun, and ruddy birds. After all, that is celestial death. Apropos of history's radical meaninglessness: can you imagine what joy it caused me when after those lines I read about the Spartans, whom we all knew as a bunch of cold militarism and bureaucratized asceticism, the alternative that Lycurgus' laws¹⁰ were either suggested by Pythia¹¹ or imported from Crete. Pythia was pure insanity, morphine delirium — Crete, on the other hand, a pure primitive world, the dominion of bull-killing Pasiphaë¹² and the child-gobbling Minotaur, simply an awe-inspiring paradise of fossil animals. *That* is virtuous Sparta: a marriage of hysteria and the aurochs!¹³ It's not worth reading about that? To cap that, I can suggest another subject and present its outline in draft form: the construction of the mausoleum for Alyattes,¹⁴ King of Lydia. That was initially built by Lydian trollops, high-class courtesans, women of the street, a complex in accordance with the country's ancient custom. Would not that be a superb counterpart to the excavation of death on Delos? The living host of gorgeous women as they build a mausoleum for the king.

¹⁰ Lycurgus (9th-century BCE?) is considered the founder of the Spartan constitution and educational system.

¹¹ The priestess of Apollo at Delphi who transmitted the oracles.

¹² In Greek mythology, Pasiphaë was wife to Minos and mother (by a bull) of the Minotaur.

¹³ I.E., now extinct long-horned cattle tribe *Bos primigenius*.

¹⁴ Alyattes (c 609-590 BCE) established the Lydian kingdom.

Let the person who is able here to distinguish democracy and aristocracy, riff-raff Eden or theocratic despotism, be on his or her feet; who is able to orientate between living demimonde and dead king, religious philosophy and suburban market. Is this where the hetaera passed into political mythology; or was it the king slipping down into the bordello? Nobody can tell, and it is not worth thinking about it. On no account is it necessary to wallow in romantic antitheses. What is important is rather that it is at last possible here with complete justification to sketch a great many architectures the way I learned from the Arab stargazer. Each and every semicircular arch has been raised through the hand of a harlot: the most abstract forms from the most abstract beings. I will rest here...”

The Pazzi to whom Brunelleschi wrote this letter was a friend of Sixtus IV. It is typical that fate so dictated that Brunelleschi should land himself with a Pazzi and not a Medici, and the pope whose shadow fell on him was not a Dominican but belonged to the Franciscan Order. The Pazzi family were parvenu peasants, the Medicis by then almost faded aristocrats. Of course, it's all more a matter of style — the Pazzis must have been lordlier lords than the Medicis, only in their temperament there was something pushier, fresher, and more robust than in the Medicis with their greater readiness for the *fioriture* of decadence.

Who was Sixtus IV? He joined the Franciscan Order; with a decent person that meant politics, morality, and intellect, and in particular one which was very much to Brunelleschi's advantage — Sixtus IV is none other than a macabre Brunelleschi profile, only world politics, the swaggering *theatrum catholicum*, projected into a wider point of view. Now and then, for the more pedantic, even their bodies were similar in external appearance. Monteverdi was never able to tell the two apart — he was well aware that the colonnade or codification of dogma, commentary on Herodotus, or the chances of excommunication were insignificant external accidents: the essence was the hungry constraints fighting inside a person's body, and what was decisive were the obsessions inhering in the insoluble chemistry of curses of the nerves; in particular, those manias were identical in architect and pope like two peas in a pod.

Life for young Monteverdi consisted solely of two parts: the mute '*an sich*'-blind treasure of objects, airs, and inflorescences and of people, whom he pictured as little foci of manias, sick and irresponsible points of selfishness that

fate slings into the senseless external world, and there they try to tame the plastic *senselessness* of the world to their own immeasurable *selfishness* and madness in a way only they are able. Every person is a will which, when it comes down to it, does not know what it wants, and every object that this will wishes to employ for the 'perming' of its own selfishness pattern in all likelihood wants to be anything in the world except the means or target of an irrational human will directed against itself. Self-directed, uninterpretable objects and stupid, aimless instinct-buds could not have found better tailor's dummies than these two forlorn figures for this double panorama.

What a superb statue is Pollaiuolo's tomb of Sixtus IV in Rome! The thin lips like a cicatrized scratch on the stem of a plant, a protruding, pointed chin, thin hooked nose, the brow raised in a thousand wrinkles, the areas round the eyes spreading into cynical, disappointed rims: as if it were the head of an infant that out of obstinacy, had died of starvation, the tiara thrust in its feeble, disillusion-proud sheathe. Because those revelers of abstraction, vigorous pessimists, and Florentine 'malcontents' are always reminiscent of children — of children in whom the senseless monster nature of man exhibits itself most frighteningly, children who are tireless creators over and over again, of the sweet tetralogy of phobias, selfishness, ignorance, and utterly consistent vengeance.

Because it is unquestionable that Brunelleschi's Renaissance is the vengeance of an affronted child brutishly looking neither left nor right, or Sixtus IV's theology, is underlined by a spot of muttering rancor. Brunelleschi's heraldic device might be a blood-red embryo or infant in a pitch-black field: disconsolateness of selfishness and ecstatic ignoring of the world shine out from that insignia. Sixtus IV experienced profoundly the problemativeness of the relation of faith and knowledge like an illness (it was his every thought). But whereas the Thomists and their great decorative syllogism were able to dress up *evidentia rei*, experience (that is to say, touch experiments drowning on a stalk of straw), and mystical or quasi-mystical intuition into a single common harmony, that did not in the least work well for young della Rovere:¹⁵ he saw the woeful gap between positivism and faith, and for that reason (not with enlightened hauteur, not likely! and drew a black line between *res* and celestial *principium* with tragic defiance). This was the

¹⁵ Sixtus IV (1414-1484) was born Francesco della Rovere.

'Franciscan principle,' which on so many occasions seemed unruffled plain common sense, although with him one of the barely maskable forms of despair. But is not that bitter resignation the tastiest background to Assisi's hymnically pampered birds?

Though della Rovere was the Minister General of the Franciscans by the time he was elected to the papal throne he strolled down from the hills around Garda like a warbling Papageno: anyone who looked at his face from close up would have been able to see the memento of the battle which tormented the whole Scotist philosophizing — the hysterical inner atheism of the positive objects of the *real* world and the *fictions* lying about there as an alluvium of the history of philosophy, i.e., the passively propagating lie amid the world of Platonic frames and abstractions. *Evidentia rei naturaliter atheistica et mundus conceptualis abstractionum naturaliter mendax est.*¹⁶ The world: godless, by definition anti-Christian; though, by the same token, *de natura*, the mendacious moon itself with its elegant harlot contours. This invisible *mendax-meretrix* moon-sickle was always more visible above della Rovere's skin-and-bone-faced head than the bonce touched by the tiara's jewelry. That della Rovere's morality was also pessimistic, which of course was a consequence of his intellectual tragedy: he did not set at the center of theology existing things and the shaky towers of Babylon of definitions of god but *morality* — God Himself was a *moral* source, logical attributes were shed from him like staves not held together by a hoop. The one concrete factor was human action, not thought: the commander — *magister* — was history, not philosophy.

The source of that conclusion, of course, was embitterment, and its melody, if it had one, was nostalgia for a once tasted but, so it seems, impossible thought. His motto was always: "If we are already living in such a terrible world that we must act instead of thinking, then let us go deaf and blind in the effort of acting, which is baloney — let us pursue morality: with obliterated brains." And because that was how he thought there was a perfect concurrence between Renaissance, pope, the landscape of the area round Garda (where he dwelled prior to his papacy), between public-lethal Brunelleschi, and the ambitious Pazzis.

¹⁶ Roughly: 'Naturally, objective evidence is atheistic and a conceptual abstraction of the world, naturally, a lie.'

What kinds of flowers accompanied the General of the Franciscan Order on his way to Rome, what kinds of trees? Olive trees! Are those plants? Organic? Are they living? Do they have love or sap? Color? None. Pale, linear, misty; the whole thing is a fine snow of problems trained into the legendary, a formal showing-off of melancholy. Silver, silver — what is to be done with silver? These mildew-velvets, stifled-pusillanimous vegetations filtered della Rovere through forests — now he could see his ascetic questions again in the mirror of nature, he was able to see that undeniably they were son of this soil, where the leaves and flowers are even bigger fakirs than him. Italy, and, it stands to reason, that the tropics have no knowledge of nature — even the olive tree is, in part, nauseating, an aggressive spice, in part a *calcule farouche* — unflinching arithmetic — as a Parisian poet put it. And what else? The cypresses? Once in Gardone I rambled around late at night to check whether I might retrace a memory and the mood of that acrimonious pope's wanderings in the unexpected fall of a bird or (with its tiny bubbles of breathing and wave beats chirrupier than a chirrup) in a fish's grief, whereat I landed by such a grove of tall cypress trees. One could not even imagine anything more awesome, more evocative of the *Toteninsel*¹⁷ — Isle of the Dead.

Low down the trunks were lighted silverish by the occasional lamp, but higher up only the reflections of the night sky reached their towering *pelisse* canopies in the places where inevitable darkness did not pour out of them like a mute waterfall. Those great poles had maybe been dipped by someone into the crater of the night, and now they were poked into the hillside as badges of triumph to see what stuck to them all around. The sort of thing that can be imagined of Assyrian kings.

That is a simile, however. Those were cypresses! These two kinds of darkness were mysterious: midnight and giant *setae* of moss — both such kindred material, and the blackness of the cypresses was nevertheless somehow at variance with the blackness of the night as if they were standing in front of a white wall. When I describe these cypresses at Gardone (what a ridiculous word “describe” is: all intellectual operations are possible only never precisely to describe or delineate something — to write it down!), in point of fact I am working against myself for what was splendid was precisely the fact that in

¹⁷ *Toteninsel* is a painting by the Swiss Symbolist artist Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901) that was popular in central Europe in the early 20th century.

them Italian abstraction achieved Teutonic frondescence, and from the direction of the stars they looked down with a calm pride at my petty patterns. What ricks of stillness those trees were: once again I can only think of those half-crazed Persian or Lydian despots who gathered together all the muteness in the world then stored it in tall towers like that as a standing reproach to their chatterbox counselors.

An abiding caress was dormant in their form: their striving for the heights was not a Gothic pose as with the bonier examples but a charismatic coiffure — someone had combed and scraped the mass together upwards that way with the palm of the hand. That was indeed a good reality gesture on the part of reality. No man nor animal, no ants or Carthusians are able to be solitary and sociable in the way of cypresses — each alone so nobly, with such Acherontic aristocracy (is there any other?), yet the garden was nevertheless such a chorus, a synod of trees absorbed in murmuring anonymity.

What is the wind doing with you that animals should be callers on you, and does the moon have a bridge to you? Here the breeze approaching at great seagull tempos from across the lake does not move the foliage, there are no boughs, branches, leaves — here the whole tree turns from the inside into a sigh like a wafer into body, in accordance with a miraculous otherworldly debility or into the music of the inside of statues of Memnon: philosophical trees inasmuch as they will not become instruments like the harps of lindens in Bamberg (I have heard them!) but for a couple of seconds — through the wind's touch — they muse with even blacker emotion and still more funereal peace over their own tree nature. But the cowardly smugglers of melody are all unworthy of them in sentences. Is that an evergreen? God knows where that color is lying low between black and green, silver and brown. But I expected that of you, reality: complete evanescence between my hands, the ultimate, victorious nuance, with which not only the *impuissant* intellect but also *impuissant* love is unable to catch up with. How they stood there by the road! How are they lovelier: if they accompany a road, or if they form a freemasons' lodge on the hillside? Here each of them was a step, a step with perennial ambiguity: agreement, conquest, form attained — and restlessness, direction, that on further, still further. That melancholic 'go, go' mood is so strong that it does not even spontaneously come to mind (is there anything which spontaneously comes to mind?); what is vertical and what horizontal, what is the tower and what the road? Just carry on standing, gloomy cypresses,

perhaps forever: altogether with your great weight that every kiss' hook is just in vain, all this Nike nothingness is nevertheless worthwhile.

You stand before me like Assyrian firebrands of a riddle while the stillness furled a black sail over the lake — and they rendered me a riddle: my heart was alien like a powder-weight star, my memory incomprehensible like a fish the name of which even fishermen do not know. That is our perennial fate: great wonders pop their heads up on our wanderings like the awakening palaces of Atlantis; gods also flash before us their harlot's shoes and philosopher's eyes — but all that remains is just a horror, a fake wonder, a pseudo-revelation: the secret of the cypress is everlasting, the mendacity in it more everlasting than its green.

(I mused about that too for a while: how can people be so impotent and theoretical that they saw an analogy to the phallus in the slim hush-spines of the cypresses? I never felt such disgust and intellectual contempt for the whole phallus sentimentality and myth mendicancy as under those trees. One must break once and for all time with every variant of 'sex plus death'.)

"What am I?" della Rovere asked himself one morning, there, among the cypresses. "What am I? In no case anything sexy, in no case any death. I am simply a mirror of the world, and simply everlasting. Life's 'basic laws' and 'basic facts' like sex and death: they are just visions of the sick, bad hobgoblins of delirium. *Principium* is always *infernale*. Woman: mirage; coffin: a mirage. And my denial of women is not even metaphysical: it is simply normal, common or garden indifference.

Love for me means nothing; death means nothing. Things usually only have 'meaning' for the obtuse and sick. In my cell there hangs a lamp on a solitary cord, with a single flame. That is also how I see it. Once, however, I fell sick and feverish and I saw three cords, three objects, and they did not hang straight down but the whole thing rotated like the spokes of a wheel. The analogy is set and unchangeable: the way a fever sees one lamp as three, the stationary as revolving, only a fever sees in an object meaning, symbol, sense, and — *horribile dictu* — a 'basic law'!

Genitalia and *mortalia* are given emphasis *only* in illness. I am not giving an apology to the faithful for peasant health. After all, I too, am a nerve only I have no spit. I am dry as a forgotten and dug-up mummy in the Sahara. This is what is decisive: endless sensibility, boundless impressionism, but no sentimentality and no thirst for *principium*.

(I cannot imagine a more perfect annihilation of Bachofen¹⁸ and Lawrence than the piece I saw the other day. In that sex and death had the most ideal roles. The subject: a murder takes place in the auditorium during a premiere in a vaudeville theatre, and in the play one minute girls are leaping before the audience's eyes, the next one sees a detail of the criminal investigation. That is the maximum or optimum that can be brought out at all from sex and death: sex is represented by half-naked mechanical girls, death by a mob of detectives, cops by dactylographers¹⁹ leaping around a pistol shot.

How kitschy even the most poetic, most ancient, and most popular myth beside such a 'vulgar' film. Let us leave these secretive plans, beyond and outside accidents of death, donkey, and sex: they are much better disentangled by a vaudeville show or film.

In time anyway everything with which myths and philosophies are concerned is transferred to the vaudeville stage: not in mockery or out of depravity or a big-city taste for blasphemy or Lord knows what, but out of intelligence: it turns out that so-called ancestral and central and the most profound 'problems' — *quelle garde-robe!*²⁰ — were only masks of impotence for sick petty-intellectuals, and playing was their sole chance of being processed.

Because life is made up of only two parts: of anonymous, irrational, and purposeless objects, and of events, i.e., play. The facts of sex and death are either indifferent, things that have neither metaphysic, nor clinical, nor poetry, *facta anonyma et indifferentes* as Sixtus IV put it — one can either play with them, style them in a vaudeville manner, apply them ornamentally, purely decoratively, frivolously. Indifference or somersault: those are the alternatives for an intelligent person — symbolical cypress smuggling is a matter only for degenerate slaves.)

And the *Pineas* and palm trees? Don't they too proclaim this ascetic standpoint around the birth of Sixtus? The Stone Pine is foliage and yet not foliage: Claude Lorrain would be able to make the most enigmatic, sweetly and autumnally languid, romantically cloudy and haunting round-midnight magic

¹⁸ Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–87) was a Swiss jurist and anthropologist, who developed theories of the role of ancient 'Mother right' (*Mutterrecht*) or Hetaerism (matriarchy) and The Dionysian (patriarchy). He is also referenced in Szentkuthy's *St. Orpheus Breviary*. See footnote 141.

¹⁹ Technical term for people who take or study fingerprints (*dactylograms*).

²⁰ What a wardrobe!

with them: and nonetheless cold, like the skinny, skeletal sibyls, who are mystic actresses with their prophecies but their bones, on account of their aridness, are Florentine, which is to say tartly rational, formal.

Form! Form! I read yesterday for the umpteenth time that “in decadent eras form predominates at the expense of content,” when even a blind person can see that the inverse is the case: great eras *in ultima analysi* are ‘devoid of content,’ only form is of interest — petty bourgeois baroqists and *fin-de-siècle* misery-guts would give their last drop of blood (in all likelihood they never have more than one) for the adored, terribly important content. Cypresses, Stone Pines, and palms are those kinds of Renaissance trees: insubstantial, virtually anorganic.

When della Rovere learned that he was going to be made the pope in Rome, it was these trees he saw — not a *Wunder des Lebens* but a *Wunder des Nicht-lebens*, or to play around: a *Nichts-Wunder des Lebens*.²¹ This pope was a Renaissance pope: not of the sensualists and naturalists.

The blue of the lake, which is never blue but either white as milk or foggy or a transparent ultragreen, compiling mirror, lizard and Madonna: never endless but simply empty: that lake is also before him, sobered-up, cooled. (Is the masquerade I am making of Sixtus too simplistic? It could be — I must trust that the accumulated variations of sensitive whimsies elsewhere will compensate for the monotony of mania.) Is there anything lovelier than a balcony room opening onto such an empty white lake? Two beds with quilted coverlets, the large baptismal font of the washbasin, the oh-so-narrow Latin hardly-door, the balcony, a sun-baked straw armchair, grilles in the big nothingness of water, sky, and air, then nothingness, auroral mist, more mundane than all of Gardone’s women put together.

Stillness: evening is stillness: innards, pelt, lining, and warmth: morning its exterior, its form, its Hellenic limitedness. On it, like minute meadow floral decorations or tiny little sketches in very thick hair, the protracted whine and bubbling of the washbasin in the room next door, the creaking of a strange chair leg on the stone flags of the balcony, the name of an Italian waiter down in the grounds of the park, an amalgam of tangos coming from two opposing directions like those of (the lacy edge of a petticoat and the smoke dahlias of the georgette dress over it!) the slight lapping of wavelets on

²¹ Not a miracle of life but a miracle of non-life ... a non-miracle of life.

the jetty, the tooting of an automobile unfamiliar back home, which is also willy-nilly a portrait of the strangers traveling in it, the champagne-bottle cracking-open of a hose pipe and afterwards the whispering of spray which scarcely differs from a September breeze searching for roses, like the hand of an older lady's does towards the hair or lips of young boys: impatiently, but with the tight-lipped discipline of salon life.

Roses: they too are flowers that are absolutely in keeping here. In a German-language brochure on Gardone I read about "*wuchernde Rosen*": 'rampant roses' — true enough, but nonetheless not baroque phenomena. Points, white, melting into space. A rose is not made prickly by its thorns, but the deportment, the whole 'mentality,' of its flowers, its leaves, and its position. It has no 'line,' no shape like women or the calla lily; only the figure is erotic or vegetative. A rose is an isolated, naïve little point of splendor — branches and leaves do not crimp or snake into the deceitful theatre of 'nature.'

I never liked roses as much as there. What two kinds of worlds! For instance, a green pasture overrun by yellow sun spurge or wolf's milk,²² a rose bush winding around the foot of a vase. Roses can be tea roses²³ — "Ceylon Tea"-s — or "*Momie de Cléopâtre*"-s, undershot with blue or black, porcellainous (?) or incensing: all the same, through the fact that they are solitary, here and there, as a rule badly as a woman, not in the least gorgeous or natural, they always strike one like a still empty, sparklingly washed cold tea service on the table when one has nevertheless already set the hopes of one's lips and fingers on the warmth of a cup of tea.

But I was perhaps infuriated even more decisively than by these towards the one-sidedness of my Sixtus fiction by the female traveling companion whom I encountered at the railway station in Vicenza. I have always felt very good at that station because most amusingly it resembles Déli Station in Budapest, which I absolutely dote on. I just happened to be quaffing the thimbleful of *birra* in customary Italian fashion, *hat on my head* (lest I be taken for a weedy young toff) in the small bar, where an Italian bloke at the very same kind of table was eating the very same kind of cheese under the very same kind of afternoon lighting, out of the very same kind of paper as I had eaten with my father in Paris in a bistro near *Les Invalides* — at that time I

²² A European spurge (*Euphorbia helioscopia*), common as a weed, with the rays of its inflorescences enfolded by yellow-tinged leaves.

²³ Hybrid rose derived from *Rosa odorata* with pink or tallow flowers.

thought I was the only one who would do such a damned fool thing as not to eat a decent lunch due to my distaste for the masses and out of cowardice, but skulk in suburban dives with stone-hard scraps of Parmesan: and what do you know but after ten years I gained release: a 'normal person' (the one and probably only god of the nervous) eats exactly the same as I do, and what's more: heartily. In my ecstasy over that, and also refreshed by the beer, I walked back besides the rail tracks, obviously, to my little zippered handbag of a coffin on which my green raglan overcoat really was lying like a wreath.

On the asphalt platform was standing a skinny woman in a linen beach outfit. For the time being she was a tritonal scale: a horribly big black hat with a wavy kale-leaf brim; under that flaming red or cinnabar hair, and holding a huge illustrated magazine with lilac pictures: on the cover, unsurprisingly, there was a naked boxer or water polo player.

I guessed she was French; they tended to be slimming-cure spread in bread-and-butter fashion with that sort of brick-red paint. The fact that her magazine was Italian was irrelevant. I decided straight away that, "You'll be a symbol if it's the last thing I do." I love (of course not in an amatory or sexual sense) these abstract women who no longer have either a body or soul — each and every one an Alexandrian hieroglyph: just as out of a sailing, rowing, galley-slave boat only a single hooked line plays a part in the script, so here all that remained of the whole of the woman's life were these few commas and splotches. The bare legs, sandals, and red danger-fingernails and the big, black hat were odd. No one is able to *not* look at someone the way those kinds of women do. Quite by chance, I ended up in the same compartment as her. She took her hat off and with great difficulty managed to ease it into the smaller of the luggage racks — obstinately, its bell continually kept on opening, and it would fall ripely onto the seat. I helped with hoisting up her trunk. She thanked me in perfect French and heavenly sweetness. More than once it was jokingly predicted of me that my undoing would be a woman who, as the hit song had it, would be "a bit of an angel and a bit of the devil." We got two middle places in the full compartment — to the right and left of the central armrest.

Next to her sat a sweaty, tubby, chinless Italian, next to me was hunched a startled, little old dame with outwardly *strabismical* eyes who was praying out of a prayer book. Opposite her a clean, blue-eyed, sun-tanned slightly balding German was reading the *Basler Nachrichten*, with the side of

the newspaper that faced me being about a party rallying in Nuremburg, with photographs. Someone who also boarded with us was an Italian girl in mourning dress with an iron engagement ring, an unfriendly, serious affair who later on turned to solving crossword puzzles, and I ruminated on how it was possible that she was not ashamed of herself. For me the line between Venice and Milan via Verona is endless, a real journey — made so by the easy monotony of the countryside, the abstract arrow-straightness of the rail track. In this case a person does not travel so much as complete miles and hours in airless space. I am fond of that so it is over quickly.

Maybe it is also important that Milan is not a center of art so much as of commerce, and when I travel there I don't have to be ashamed that I am not a salesman or engineer: I rattle along civilly together with all the other civilians as if I had business in Milan or Turin — the sole place where I manage to be a 'traveler' among the travelers.

With the shared armrest my head came eerily close to the woman's. What is red is red, I ascertained the big news when with anti-philosopher impudence I examined her hair — "*wir wanderten durch Feuergluten*."²⁴ It was a curious material: it was gathered in broad waves but every strand seemed separate, and the skin of the scalp beyond its deep-purple roots was not hidden. But that is not devilish redness and not the redness of life: there was no apocalyptic sin, no vitalist fire.

It was then that Sixtus IV, albeit a little illegitimately but definitively, was born, and with him Brunelleschi and the whole alkali-and-acid-Renaissance. How that chignon twisted, streamed, and roamed beside me, and yet its every line was evident, deliberate, its weight, its direction, its supporting strength, its shadow — everything. It was red the way only the hair of dyed-in-the-wool whores is but nevertheless remained in near-idyllic shape — sealed and 'neat' like a Venetian snuffbox heirloom.

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²⁴ "*Wir wandelten durch Feuergluten*" ("We wandered through the fire's glow") is a line from a duet between Pamina and Tamino towards the end of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

Backdrops to the Ultimate Questions: Szentkuthy's Diary Life



Mária Tompa

Why, then, is a diary the ultimate ideal in place of the honest superstition of the old-fashioned 'objective opus'? ... a truly intellectual response is only a *complete life*, along with all its startling events, its endless chains of associations, the million varieties of mood.¹

In Szentkuthy's oeuvre, everything is connected to the diary, or journal, as a way of life. The rejection of all superfluous human functions (a *divertissement* in the Pascalian sense of a distraction), concentration, and alertness is the basis of the power of memory. With Szentkuthy, that leads one straight to the quotidian experience of metaphysics:

¹ *Marginalia on Casanova* (New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2013) §73, p. 134.

Every part of the world is in my head at every moment... I think I have no need to apologize for using the word metaphysics... The backdrops to the ultimate questions are constantly round me. Thus, all regions, all pasts, all the stretching force of the ultimate questions is surrounding me right now...²

And in Chapter 7 of *Frivolities & Confessions*, Szentkuthy relates — apropos his childhood experiences — that he was not fond of playing either chess or bridge because for him they qualified as attention-distracting occupations. He felt throughout his life that he needed to be on the alert lest demons lay hold of him, lest devilish temptations unexpectedly befall him. As Szentkuthy declares, echoing Pascal:

Every human function is nothing other than a ludicrous avoidance or silencing of the thought of divinity and death... I am unable to play self-obliviously because I have to be constantly in touch, this very moment as well, with the ultimate questions.³

Metaphysics is my day-to-day milieu; I am unable to resign myself to something just being the way it is, I can't abide a speck of dust but immediately fly off to the boundaries of the gas clouds of Andromeda's spiral galaxy and to the supernovae, where I may also come across a speck of dust, but oh! how differently!⁴

How many times did he confess that the most supreme mythology and at the same time the tiniest details (specks of dust) of mundane reality together exerted their effects on him.

The matter of the incompleteness of his life's work can be approached from this angle: one of Szentkuthy's key traits was his living in the present, with a deeply rooted faith that could not be extirpated. Like a tree — he said — which, as it were, holds its own by the present, in reality and in secret grows and spreads itself, but its measurements, the end-result, very noticeably branch out. And the present is always *unfinished, continuous*. It was said of him many times that he was a free spirit. But in his case permanent living in the present is crystallized in the act of concentration. His *incompleteness* followed from the fact that his main literary form was his daily journal, his *diary*, but that had paradoxical aspects too, was composed,

² *Frivolitások és hitvallások* (Magvető: Budapest, 1988) XX. "Egy napom" (One of My Days) 543. Hereafter FC.

³ FC, VII "Elemista élmények" [Experiences at Elementary School], 159.

⁴ FC, I "Végrendelet és invokáció" [Testament and Invocation], 10.

and through that 'compositional trick' he was also present in the past and the future. His intense observations kept him on the surface both in his consciousness and in his sharp alertness from one moment to the next.

In one of a series of lectures, Elemér Kéry compared Szentkuthy to Orpheus: It is generally thought of Orpheus that he accompanied the Argonauts, giving them advice: "to be an Argonaut was nothing else than to be on an endless voyage into the infinitude of the coordinate."⁵ Incompleteness is therefore a structure that attends life. Consider the following entry on 'Geometrical Symbols' from the Hungarian *Encyclopaedia of Mythology*: "Particularly widespread is the meander [...]. [A]n endless line breaking at right angles, symbolizes the lack of a beginning and an end, eternity."⁶ And Henri Boulad, a Jesuit based in Egypt, writes: "Life progresses in dance steps; it does not run up against its boundaries and never reaches a goal where it might take a rest. The Spirit sees to it that the horizon should always move further back."⁷

Szentkuthy was fond of condensation or mixing-up time, anachronisms: with their aid he could dart around freely, play between dimensions, because these ensured him nothing less than a constant *present tense*! He often mentioned, almost too often, that he lived continuously in the present. What, though, did that mean for him concretely? Perhaps that, too, has to be imagined in a higher reality. From February 1987, we worked together every morning on corrections to the typescript of *Frivolities & Confessions* that I had edited. At those shared daily séances, I was continually fretting because he had never checked the vast amount of editing I had carried out over several years (he trusted me), but it could also be the case that by the time I had something ready he would simply draw a line with his pen and cross out everything I had done. After several weeks of such sessions, with several chapters gone through, I could begin to relax. He was satisfied, pleased with the result, and his corrections were more in the nature of additions or supplements. Early one morning, with the sun shooting almost horizontally across the pines into the library room, we sat beside each other at the writing table, correcting the manuscript. Out of tact, he was in the habit of giving pseudonyms to people he came across, one way or another, in the course of his life. He took out his index of

⁵ Elemér Kéry, lecture on the myth of Orpheus, given to the Kossuth Club, Budapest, December 1996. (Private notes of Mária Tompa).

⁶ *Mitológiai Enciklopédia*, vol. 1 (Budapest: Gondolat, 1988) 81. Translator's note: The meander was originally Maiandros, the winding River Mæander, in Asia Minor. All further notes by the translator will be marked [TN].

⁷ Henri Boulad, *A Szentlélek ezer arca* [The Thousand Faces of the Holy Ghost] (Budapest: Kairosz, 2005) vol. 1, 179.

those pseudonyms and we leafed through it, finding insect names, each more hilarious than the last, not a few of which brilliantly suited the character of the person in question. For instance, consider this exchange: “LK [Kabdebó Lóránt]: Who did you go around with? Come on out with your pseudonyms! MSz [Miklós Szentkuthy]: László Jób Baránszky, then *Melonatus*... LK: Can’t you recall his Christian name? MSz: The hell I can’t! Brown-legged mourning hopper...”⁸

We carried on the game tirelessly, doubling up with laughter, and by the end of several hours of joint work, when even the sun had turned away from the library windows, we were left out of breath and dead tired by the time we sipped our ritual coffees. To be honest, our laughter assumed almost ecstatic proportions, and at its end I felt I was in some sort of trance: this is no longer the present, he is no longer living, perhaps me neither; those few hours had passed some time in the past with me taking part in the ‘séance’ by peeking through some kind of transcendental keyhole. More than a year passed, and when that memorable morning came to mind after he had died, I had a definite feeling that the joint work was going on right there and then, with our shared howls of laughter making their dotty meanders in the present.

Much has already been said about a *mania for collecting* being the foundation for all of Szentkuthy’s manifestations. However, he did not thereby wish to preserve himself for posterity, as some people have speculated. He makes that clear:

Immortalization, the pinning down of memories, leaves me cold. It is not to satisfy a thirst for durability that I keep a diary, and it is also not why I adore photographs; it is more because something only becomes reality for me if I photograph it or write it down. And then again any chap who dallies with serious literature likes reality... All diaries that are worth anything are of extraordinary interest because they are a series of snapshots of the various mental states of a person... My lovers only became real for me if I introduced them to my parents. Once they knew them, I would calm down: they had made the trip to Enyedi Street,⁹ and from then on they were not ‘unreal.’¹⁰

In other words, the reason he kept a regular diary for decades on end was because that was how every moment of his days became real: he collected his great library in

⁸ FC, XXIII, 635.

⁹ In the XII District of Buda. Today Nagyenyed Street.

¹⁰ FC, XX, 549–50.

order to make his lectures become real.¹¹ But capturing reality also applies to abstract concepts, because a *Catalogus rerum*, an index of phenomena, which was one of the major basic pillars of his oeuvre, was likewise a big compilation, a recording of questions in full knowledge of the fact that we are never granted answers to the ultimate questions, leaving the task of keeping as accurate as possible a cataloguing of ultimate questions. Also, writing itself, the fixing of thoughts (which likewise thereby became real), was with him an intensive experiencing of the manifoldness of the present. In *Marginalia on Casanova* he states that “a ‘thought’ is both an absolute *description* together with an absolute *stimulation*.”¹² In the same text he carries on with the idea that these two supreme merits and the two most important possibilities will constitute a Copernican revolution in the history of thinking:

Through [my life] I am able to provide a rationale for the diary style of my entire oeuvre, my utter homesickness for an endlessly complete diary... Why, then, is a diary the ultimate ideal in place of the honest superstition of the old-fashioned ‘objective opus’? ... a truly intellectual response is only a *complete life*, along with all its startling events, its endless chains of associations, the million varieties of mood. ... Metaphysics can at last find itself in this diary ideal: a complete intellect can only be a complete life, all landscapes, all loves, all books, all friends, all notions.¹³

After this he added in all seriousness: “the separation of some form of fictive ‘opus’ and ‘diary’ would be an intellectual capital crime and damnation...”¹⁴ And here he claims to “copy” out of the very first page of his diary. Yet we didn’t find this text of the “first page of the diary,” because from 1931 to 1939 he left only fragmentary rough papers, he began his notes anew several times, and it was in 1939 when day by day, regularly, he had begun to write his diary. During the ordering and classification of several thousand pages of his diary we might discover if he made up a text at the time of writing those marginalia or whether he really did copy a ten-line passage from the “first page” of his diary. However, the existence or otherwise of at least those few lines will become apparent, as well as how, indeed, the “*complete*

¹¹ Of course, one must not lose sight of the fact that he was well aware of the subjective power of reality, a reality to which he paradoxically had his own special entrance, and above all the fact that he strewed marginal notes all over his books.

¹² *Marginalia on Casanova* §73, p. 133.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

life, along with all its startling events, its endless chains of associations...," actually appears in the diary, the 'main work of his life.'

One can maybe therefore understand why he did not consider himself to be a writer, or at least a novelist, but a thinker, an 'interrogatee of life.' In an interview given to András Mezei, he recounted feeling like a third person with a 'confessional profession' who:

... seeks the most realistic kernel of reality, he wishes to declare total and absolute truth, which is why from day to day for forty years he has been writing a gigantic diary... he sees, hears, and touches everything with microscopic precision... he is a forlorn interrogator and interrogatee of the world's end-causes and end-objectives, one who devastatingly drives to despair and at the same time scrupulously takes an inventory of questions which appear insoluble from the very start...¹⁵

Antal Szerb¹⁶ writes in his 1936 review of Szentkuthy's *A Chapter About Love*: "I imagined both of us entering a room, looking round, going out, and reporting what we had seen. Szentkuthy's version would certainly be ten times richer and longer than mine..."¹⁷ He would not have liked to swap places with him as it must be tiring to live with such an intensive faculty of perception.

Our words are often inadequate to express our thoughts and emotions, Szentkuthy admitted. That was why he introduced baroque scenes into his works, why he made use of so many metaphors. He felt it was an immensely difficult undertaking: to make transparent, to organize into the form of questions all the illusions and untidy insistence which permeates our character. That was why the formula of simplicity, the one and only metaphor, strode its path towards its search for ultimate truth, knowing that this was a Sisyphean struggle. "I am not a writer but an interrogator of the world." It is alarming to contemplate how much he lived in a continual inner storm, as it is rare for there to be peace in the world. That was why he lived in a permanent present, for his favorite genre being the diary, the concise marginal note, close-up examination, with his being so complex (in his works he often provides side notes to his own thoughts, often pinning them in the

¹⁵ *Az élet faggatottja: beszélgetések, riportok, interjúk Sz.M.-sal* [An Interrogatee of Life: Conversations, Reports, and Interviews with Miklós Szentkuthy] (Budapest: Hamvas Intézet, 2006) 93.

¹⁶ Slightly older than Szentkuthy, Szerb (1901–45) was also an Anglicist and became a major literary scholar in Hungary (e.g., his *History of World Literature*, published in 1941, holds its authority to the present day). He was killed in a German concentration camp.

¹⁷ Originally published in the journal *Valóság*, No. 9 (1936). Reprinted in *A mítosz mítosza. In memoriam Szentkuthy Miklós*, ed. Gyula Rugási (Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 2001) 47–50.

middle of sentences); because it was where, in the present, in an intimacy with small realities, that the muddled fragility of one's nature becomes perceptible. He was far from attempting to simplify things, people, events, encounters. He knew that for him that was impossible. He feared that as he would never reach the one and only metaphor, here, on Earth, he would drive himself into emptiness. He talked to me more than once about the hell of his depression in 1974–78. His much-cited search for the 'reality of realities,' his touch of it, his keeping a keen eye on it, his portrayal of it, was nothing else but the staggeringly great desire and ability of that manifold human being to always express and convincingly represent the prevailing baroque.

The saying "*Nulla dies sine linea*"¹⁸ (not a day without a line drawn or written) fitted him perfectly, yet he often complained about how difficult writing was for him in practice, well nigh forced labor:

For me the most incomprehensible secret is how someone can keep writing or building on a subject in one style to the very end. To achieve that degree of consistency I would need to freeze into some sort of intellectual tetanus as I am in a constantly changing relationship to my subject, and that is the most fundamental reality. As soon as I want only to carry on with a topic in the manner I started, and to shut out giving any idea of my new relationship to it, then the topic gives such a ridiculously artificial, preposterously isolated, and false impression that I have to rip it up. Once I have hit upon a subject, it is inside me in any case: in my soul, my mind, my guts — it is a constituent part of my constitution, like food being digested. Once I begin expressing, I capture the form in which it happens to be present in my constitution: the subject and my entire constitution, inside and out, are a single uniform entity. After a while I abandon the work of expression, and let's say want to 'pick it up' again that afternoon. The sun shines in through the window differently, I feel an entirely new, strange sense of warmth in my skin, this warmth closes off or ferments my blood differently, a new ebb and flow of food is at work in my stomach: all that naturally entails a complete change of 'subject,' or rather of style of intonation of the subject — after all the subject was not hanging in the air outside me but was in my guts, in my heart, and in the scheming torpedoes of hormones. Subject and style are always a component, indeed an organ, of the whole body: the body, however, is in permanent flux. It raises the question of literary asceticism: a great writer is precisely one who is able to vanquish the constant transforming and deforming changes of subject urged by the body, and, with draining exertion, is true to the work outside of him, not to some 'bodily mimicry' inside his body. For me that is impossible

¹⁸ Pliny attributes this saying to the painter Apelles. [TN]

because works are of no interest to me: literature qua literature is totally alien. I could not for a microsecond pay attention to a work, because a work (a work ripped from the body of a living writer) does not stand in infinite proximity to the God growing restless at the biological, 'to-ing and fro-ing' of the 'inner body' which is present in life from moment to moment.¹⁹

Szentkuthy was fundamentally an impressionist by temperament, and on many occasions he proclaimed: anything that he happened to come across in life he immediately concerned himself with it thoroughly, waking round it more than once, smelling it, taking it to pieces. The title of *Harmonikus tépett lélek* [A Harmonious Ripped Soul] refers to the same thing. In it, continuous 'presence' and 'breaking up' crops up at several points:

I do not cast my mind back to my childhood thoughts but really how as a child, now with inner tempests, I lived through the First World War, and that nowadays, as I said, every momentum is present inside me... It costs me a big artistic struggle and difficulty to create a coherent work, because a thousandth part of every syllable, every nuance, and every gesture makes an extraordinarily deep impression on me, and moreover immediately at that, as when incense is lit and the fumes of fantasy instantly supplements it. On account of my sensitivity I find it very hard to give up grimacing, the details... For example, I will read a verse of poetry, and I see every word immediately, and as soon as I have said it a whole heap of associations are aroused. It is therefore hard for me to set all those many tiny impressions, all that colorful, passionate intensity, that hyper-super-mosaic into a nonetheless uniform, well-made composition.²⁰

The outcome of that is that nothing feels finished, everything in the world is open, everything connects with everything else, everything mills around in the present, everything is experimentation, repetition, eternal movement... or eternal motionlessness, a nude descending a staircase... a metaphysical squirrel.

I do not publish my diary, not even bits of it, for the same reasons specialists in internal medicine or psychiatrists do not make the findings of lab tests on their patients publicly available... [Each] line of my diary is bristling with indiscretions, so-called inadmissible details of physical and mental life... each section of,

¹⁹ *Narcisszusz tükre* [Narcissus' Mirror] (Budapest: Magvető, 1995) 16.

²⁰ *Harmonikus tépett lélek* [A Harmonious Ripped Soul] (Budapest: Magvető, 1994) 46. This book derives from a video interview with Szentkuthy that was shot in June of 1986. Its title, "a harmonious ripped soul," was an expression made by Szentkuthy in the course of the interview.

let's say, 20 or 30 pages can only be understood from the perspective of a larger part... a vehement diary-writer may stylize himself and events in a novelistic manner. Insignificant things are magnified, significant things scaled down.²¹

In *Ágoston olvasása közben* [While Reading Augustine], published posthumously in 1993, there is an interesting passage in which Szentkuthy analyses Eckhart Peterich's *Die Theologie der Hellenen*.²² Weighing up the literary qualities of Peterich and Walter F. Otto,²³ he writes: "If someone were to look at just the notes I wrote in the margins of the Peterich book, they might think that that kind of 'theology' could not evince from me anything other than sarcasm." Yet, in fact, Szentkuthy analyzed the views of Peterich and Otto, as well as St. Augustine, enthusiastically, and went into considerable depth. As he stressed, though, a diary can often be misleading, with short-lived mood swings often bubbling up and coming to the fore. That was his reason for discretion. Events, people, and conflicts in extraordinary renditions, thumbing his nose at the power of time to make one forget, lined up with a garnish of fantastic exaggerations; his visions of jealousy and other things were also vehement, indeed at times in his demonic descriptions they grow out of the hotbed of that particular 'mini-reality,' the reality to which he had his own private entrance.

Discerning and appraising the world from the viewpoint of the 'highest mythology,' for one thing he saw everything from a wide perspective (it was from here that he gained his remote associations), which was protection for him, adding a certain self-assurance to the intemperance of his writings. For another thing, seeing in perspective within the realm of free associations, he seeks to be in nano-proximity to mini-reality so that, making use of all sensory organs (and borrowing other sensory organs, as he would admit jocularly), he could catalogue that micro-world, which on the other hand would render him vulnerable, and in that wounded state his prose became strongly excited, indeed would acquire a dramatic tone as if the curious metaphors came to his mind in order to spur the woundedness. He admitted to living simultaneously, which is difficult for us to imagine in our polarized world but nevertheless one has to say that this twin aspect of his character appears to be the best formula for mapping his oeuvre. After all, at the time of

²¹ FC, XX, 556.

²² Eckhart Peterich, a German novelist, journalist, and translator (1900–68), published *Die Theologie der Hellenen* in 1938.

²³ Walter Friedrich Otto (1874–1958) was a German classical philologist particularly known for his work on the meaning and legacy of Greek religion and mythology, as in his 1929 work *The Gods of Greece*. From 1933 to 1945 — and from 1935 — he was the administrator of the 'Scientific Committee' of the Nietzsche Archive.

recording his realities his impressionist character was his chief stylistic trait. He would put down his momentary sentiments on paper straight away, and there, on the sheets of the diary, it was captured for good and all even if the very next day, or a fortnight later, he held a diametrically opposed opinion about the person or thing.

... [T]he diary is often full of huge outbursts of passion, laudatory hymns, and abusive curses... one has to be careful, the diary cannot always be taken literally. Secondly, the diary is not always a sanctum of frankness; indeed, it is very frequently one of role-playing. Particularly with me, being a born comedian... I am always jesting, so in the diary there is a lot of role playing; sometimes outright lying. A person stylizes himself. Possibly not so much for the audience as for oneself, but those are banalities anyway. Those who are around me here, they too are doing the same thing even if I don't record that in the diary.²⁴

It should be noted here that in contrast to the baroque style cascading through his literary works, his diary is extraordinarily condensed to the point of being lapidary or telegraphic. He often used the musical term *stretto*²⁵ and as a simile cited the keystones or *quoins*, the stones at the top of Gothic arches or vaults in Gothic cathedrals, which may be small but carry all kinds of big biblical scenes in a small space yet are at the same time readily understood: the birth of the Virgin Mary, the Annunciation, the birth of Jesus, the adoration of the three magi, the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem...

Although we are not yet in a position to inspect the condensed style with which he made such frequent reference since the earliest parts of the diary remain under ordering for some months, much the same is on view in the marginal notes with which numerous books of his library are studded. The diary-like comments display that same compactness. Personally, I was a witness on more than one occasion to his resorting, especially in his final years, to dictating from parts of the diary. The structure of the texts in question, naturally, could not be the same as the diary's very deliberate structure, being only partly disclosed. But it was a source of great enjoyment for me to observe in the course of dictation the extent to which he was able to organize and condense what he wanted to say, and from that point of view the dictated thoughts count as true extracts from the diary. That was certainly an important intermediate solution if, for instance he began to fall behind in writing a work, or at times like late March of 1986, when he got back home after a spell of

²⁴ *Az élet faggatottja*, 116.

²⁵ A tightly bound passage played at gradually increasing speed. [TN]

hospitalization which had lasted for several weeks. During dictating sessions he would often remark: “See there — the compactness of which I am capable!” looking for praise through a joking cry of “Fishing for compliment!”

Taking all things into consideration, it is not surprising that inspection of the gigantic diary was placed under lock (the parts written between 1932 and 1948 will be opened for inspection in 2013 (25 years after his death in 1988), with the remainder, the volumes covering the years 1948–88, being opened in 2038 (50 years after his death)).²⁶ Obviously, that raises the question of why 1948 should mark the turning point. For Szentkuthy, it was a major event in that it was then that he returned to Hungary after a year’s study trip in London. He had been uncomfortable with the fact of emigrating; indeed, he regarded it as a form of betrayal. Being a Hungarian writer, he wanted to live out his personal identity, along with all of its difficulties, in his native country. It was back home that he could envisage himself as being enamored of the language; he thought it was grotesque and, above all, senseless to light his imagination in voluntary exile, a thousand miles from his native land, and set down on paper the offspring of an imagination which luxuriated in the Hungarian language and artificially create a substratum for that mother language. Equally, though, he knew full well what was awaiting him in Hungary. He had no illusions when, on a cold November evening, he stepped down from the train from Vienna at Keleti (Eastern) Railway Terminus in Budapest, and looking around at the grey desolation of the station, he was astonished to observe that, apart from him, only seven passengers had got off the train. He sensed that was a chilly premonition. Straightaway he found himself fired from his position at the Árpád Gimnázium (Grammar School), leading him to declare ironically: “Who could possibly have thought he would come home?” As one now knows, he lived in a condition of total internal emigration during the Fifties. At the same time, his pupils related how he would be continually noting down in a black-covered notebook their slang words and humorous banter, which

²⁶ A miscellany of his early diary notes with illustrations was produced in 1929–31 and Szentkuthy and I came across them together at the bottom of a cupboard in the early Eighties. Those he did not regard as needing to be blocked; indeed, he went so far as to permit in June of 1988 an exhibition of those illustrations and some of the pertinent texts to be put in the French Institute in Budapest to mark his 80th birthday (in these diary-pages there are many manuscript-folios on which texts and illustrations are inseparable). A bit later a selection of those early diary materials was published in a joint issue of the journal *Műhely* [Workshop] in 1992. Szentkuthy was emphatic on more than a few occasions that he did not consider his sketches to be independent works of art, but only as illustrations closely linked to entries in the diary. Where possible, I arranged the entire contents of the folder in chronological order, treating the drawings and texts as being of equal value, though a selection did have to be made among the drawings as we were not in a position of being able to publish the entire collection, given that over the period in question he had produced more than 300 sketches.

he would later draw on in his writings and translations. Until his very last moments, his ever-alert collecting of new colors of the language was one of the key diary activities, and as in a mystic mill, he would chew on those inside himself before fitting them into his works. On the whole, even outside the school he maintained very good, amiable relations with his pupils, including the 'girls' who often thronged around him, with the instinctive or deliberate goal of staying in close touch with such mini-realities, life's trivia. The girls were those he taught between 1951 and 1955 at the Lajos Kossuth Technical School of Economics, Budapest, after which for more than thirty years they would regularly go round to his place on his birthday or name day to greet him and to report on how their lives had developed. It was this side of Szentkuthy's life that is on display in the volume *Égő katedra* [Incendiary Teacher's Platform] and the recollections of all of his pupils, not just the girls, were gathered together. He was rigorous with keeping up his diary in London, and after he returned to Hungary he wrote those entries under the title "*Ritorno d'Ulisse*," taking his cue from Monteverdi's opera.²⁷

He often had occasion to talk about the vast diary project. Thus, in a television portrait made to mark his 75th birthday in 1983, he spoke about it in the following terms to the literary historian and critic Pál Belohorszky: "[A]s I am not a professional novelist, dramatist, etc., the *chef-d'oeuvre* (my life) is a huge diary. To photograph it in the National Széchényi Library,²⁸ a lot of film would be used because it consists of some seventy-odd bulky volumes. I am still writing the diary day by day; in it are ... all my reading matters, people, figures, situations, trips, events in world history.... It is not for the sake of *épater le bourgeois*, it adds up to at least a hundred thousand pages."²⁹

Another spectacular occasion was another TV report, this one an interview by András Kepes:³⁰

... I have a particular fetish for contrasts, this two-part approach, this parallel: is there a spoonful more or less vinegar in the bean

²⁷ *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (1640).

²⁸ In 1987, the whole diary was placed in the safekeeping of the Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum (PIM) — Petőfi Literary Museum, Budapest.

²⁹ The TV interview was transcribed for the volume *Az élet faggatottja* (Budapest: Hamvas Intézet, 2006).

³⁰ András Kepes: Studio 83. National Széchényi Library, summer of 1983, and specifically to mark Szentkuthy's depositing of his diary, the Library having been prompted to have the occasion recorded in view of the sheer magnitude, the spectacular mass of documents and boxes that contained the diary. That report was also transcribed in full for the volume *Az élet faggatottja* (Budapest: Hamvas Intézet, 2006).

soup, has an unknown gas made an appearance in the latest color image of the planet Neptune? Those are all parallel with one another, and inasmuch as I am hopelessly in love with the cosmos, likewise not just because it is an interesting contrast, but I am fond of portraying tiny realities, the everyday aspects of human life, all the things of which life is composed... The old favorite parallel of mine: bean soup and a crummy tram ticket and a closed or open Einsteinian universe. To your good health!³¹

And in so saying he ended any continuation of work by a flabbergasted Kepes and camera crew.

In October of 1979 he wrote a letter of request and also guidance to the editors of the encyclopedia called “Who’s Who”:

My apologies for disturbing you for even a second in the tremendous work you do but I would be grateful if in your encyclopedia a word could be spared on what I regard, so to say, as my MAIN WORK. This is in the form a very extensive DIARY, which comes to 51 packets, each of which is approx. 1,600 pages long. Of those, 36 are already on deposit with the National Széchényi Library, while parcels 37–51 are still with me at home...³²

When Lóránt Kabdebó asked him about his models as a diarist (or memoirist), Szentkuthy mentioned the journals of the Duc de Saint-Simon³³ and the *Journal Intime* (Private Journal) of Henri-Frédéric Amiel³⁴ in the first place, followed by the diary of Samuel Pepys (1633–1703) from the English baroque era, and among Hungarians the diary of the writer Milán Füst.³⁵ But what was also very instructive for Szentkuthy may well have been his scrutinizing of the essay of Gábor Halász (1901–45) on the diary of Zsigmond Justh (1863–94), making repeated reference to the conversations they had held, adding, to pick up again a slightly earlier passage from *Frivolities & Confessions*:

Watch out! Reader on the loose... A vehement diary-writer may stylize himself and events in a novelistic manner. Insignificant things are magnified, significant things scaled down. A diary often

³² Miklós Szentkuthy, *Válogatott levelezés* [Selected Correspondence] (Budapest: Hamvas Intézet, 2008) 172.

³³ Louis de Rouvroy, Paris, 1675–1755.

³⁴ Swiss philosopher and poet, Geneva, 1821–1881.

³⁵ 1888–1967. Füst’s most well known novel, *A feleségem története*, was published in 1942 (and in English translation by Ivan Sanders in 1980 as *The Story of My Wife*).

contains incredible fits of passion whether those are in the form of hallelujahs or curses... In the diary of a writer who is in any case inclined to exaggerate things, the failure to keep things in proportion will just pelt down. All those dangers can be avoided by a later reader if he reads lengthy passages from the diary and is thereby able to attune himself to the appropriate standard: at what points a diary is a scriptural confession and when there is comic role-playing, when it is a blind temper tantrum and when objectivity of mathematical precision.³⁶

Slightly before the above passage in *Frivolities & Confessions*, he makes this pronouncement as to what his diary contains:

1) In it is every person, living and dead, whom I happened to encounter or remembered that particular day. My dreams also figure in detail, portraits, costumes, a jungle of events, a European odyssey of traveling, descriptions of the countryside, oceans of reading matter, dense annotations to news stories, big and small, of the daily newspapers, terse or long marginalia on all music or pictures, thoughts of a philosophical bent, hundred-branched plans for books, octopus-armed fantasies, extracts of unconventional prayers, life's tiniest episodes, precise à la carte descriptions of my meals, to contrast those with astronomical questions about the universe if that happened to be what I was reading that day, descriptions of flowers... As I have already had occasion to remark several times: I live and die for the excitement of the parallels of Big Nature, Big History, and Big Mythology coupled with the micro-events of one's mundane life that take place from minute to minute. Freud! St. Augustine!³⁷

In the same place, with regard to his way of compiling the diary:

... With me virtually everything is a 'readymade' dramatic scene, characters, descriptions of settings... if I read a theological work, instantly all the questions of mythology, religions, and heresy pile up in simple, arrow-tipped sentences in my diary. Because, believe it or not, I bring into being the same sort of compactness as the crowding of scenes into a small space on the capital of a Romanesque style column... I devote primary concern to the composition of the diary. Every single day, very often every single hour is composed as a dramatic, theatrical scene; indeed, let it be said gently that I sometime look at details of my actual life from the viewpoint of the diary and before carrying something out I have

³⁶ FC, XX, 553.

³⁷ Ibid., 551–552.

already the way in which I would like to write it down later in the diary.³⁸

That is consistent with what he says about ‘absolute *description*’ and ‘absolute *stimulation*,’ the previously quoted statement from *Marginalia on Casanova*.³⁹

Emphasis has been placed on the ‘composedness’ of the diary, but to look at it from the opposite end, Szentkuthy always took great care not to introduce a raw diary-like character into his novels, as is commonly the case with many young prose writers when they start out. Once a very young writer brought Szentkuthy his first prose work to get his opinion on it. That said raw diary-like character shone out. Szentkuthy explained that if he wished to become a writer, then he would have to learn how one interlarded diary experiences in a qualified manner into one’s works because passages of raw diary writing in a novel would always lack the magic spell of creating a connection. As the Hungarian poet János Arany wrote in his 1861 poem “Vojtina’s *Ars Poetica*”: “*Nem a való hát: annak égi mássa / Lesz, amitől függ az ének varázsa.*” (So, not the real, then, but its heavenly twin. / From that will the song draw its magic spin.)⁴⁰ It is also interesting how Antal Szerb warned his younger colleague in a letter sent from London in 1930:

What astounded me in your letter was that attitude typical of the young Proust in which you seek to turn your experiences of events straightaway into literature. My dear Miklós, that is highly and dangerously naïve. To express myself: in literature the only things that count are literary experiences, reading matter, thoughts, etc., the things that Gundolf and his like⁴¹ call *Bildungserlebnis* — personal experiences of growing-up. In my (modest) opinion, it is precisely those which inform creation, the *Urerlebnis*-es — the primitive experiences — are utterly irrelevant and play the role of, roughly, chance, the unpredictable, in creation.⁴²

Many of his works, whether finished or unfinished, carry the stamp of continuity with the diary life. The diary-novel *Barokk Róbert* [Robert Barokk],

³⁸ Ibid., 552–553.

³⁹ Cf. footnote 11.

⁴⁰ This is a nearly 500-line narrative poem written by Arany (1817–82), unquestionably the leading poet of the latter half of the 19th century, about a Northern Hungarian (Slovakian)-born poetaster by the name of Mátyás Vojtina who moved to Pest. Buda and Pest were unified in 1872. Before, Pest (or: Pesth) and Buda were separate. For centuries, the capital of Hungary was Pozsony, today Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. [TN]

⁴¹ Friedrich Gundolf (1880–1931) was a German-Jewish literary scholar and poet, most famous for a book on Goethe. [TN]

⁴² Szentkuthy, *Válogatott levelezés* [Selected Correspondence] (Budapest: Hamvas Intézet, 2008) 386.

which he wrote as far back as 1927, before any of his previously published words, he never thought important enough to have published, and ever less so the older he got, feeling it to be an unpublishable, adolescent, immature piece of writing.⁴³ By and large he forgot all about it. When he was 75, in the process of making the tape recordings on which *Frivolities & Confessions* were based, he referred to it as though the novel was about his father and was merciless in revealing all manner of things. In fact, he himself was Robert Barokk, under his original name of Miklós Pfisterer: a 17-year-old adolescent, emotionally mixed-up, and only in his memories as an old man Szentkuthy did identify himself with his father. At the time of writing the novel, the 19-year-old young man could contemplate the novel's 17-year-old protagonist (or at least try to view him) with some perspective of distance, but to a reader of today the two-year difference between Miklós Pfisterer and Robert Barokk is blurred, which provides scope for some interesting psychological inferences. One feels now that the 19-year-old writer Miklós Pfisterer is equivalent to Robert Barokk and the diary novel reads as if both of them are writing it. From a distance of 70–80 years on, the scenes are sometimes comic, sometimes heart wrenching, sometimes portrayed with razor-sharp authenticity, sometimes exasperatingly over-complicated. Those tones quite certainly did not exist at the time the novel was written but have sprung up with the passage of time in readers of the present age, so that the situations in the novel thereby gain new colors.

The main characteristic of *Barokk Róbert*, nevertheless, is analysis — above all, self-analysis. As a grammar-school boy he was passionate about going to confession, examining himself, and of course, through himself, also those around him, with scrupulousness and ruthless severity. That was a time when Freud's deep-psychological approach was becoming well known across Europe.⁴⁴ Perhaps the most marked feature of *Barokk Róbert* is that it is a 'Catalogus rerum' of merciless self-analysis.

Still, I am attracted by the idea — while keeping a maximum hold on his important secrets, in point of fact to the end of his life, sometimes with childish exaggeration — that he incorporated a memory of his childhood confessions into his whole character. The whole system of his diary is one enormous confession, the details of which, the pages that he wrote from day-to-day, were composed by him as he noted in *Frivolities & Confessions*. Nevertheless, the mental compulsion of

⁴³ It was published posthumously by Jelenkor publishing house of Pécs in 1991, with a second edition by Magvető in 2002. In French it was published by Librairie José Corti of Paris in 1998.

⁴⁴ See FC, XIII "Az egyetlen metafora felé" [*Towards the One and Only Metaphor*], 391.

confessing remained and bubbled up like an underground spring in his works, even their subject matter.

In the first volume of the *St. Orpheus Breviary*, Szentkuthy says this of Casanova, though he is writing about himself as well: "That is the psychology which operates in him: it derives from the psychology of confession..."⁴⁵ In the introductory "Vita (Life of a Saint)," which is about Saint Alfonso Maria di Liguori, there is another telling passage on confession:

...the penitences of old penitents flourishing like the *Arabian Nights* in his imagination; adolescent memories were as if they had been the healthy spots of sick puberty in his soul, so that he (as the rascally lexicographers used to express it), 'the greatest confessor of all confessors: he himself went off to confess, but no one dared to undertake that holy operation in the end — why had it not occurred to him before! — he trudged off, neck pulled into his chest, to one of his greatest foes...' ⁴⁶

That is likewise a recollection of a remark in his diary: in his adolescence he would go to a priest who disliked him 'just because.' In *Barokk Róbert*, he admits to a dramatically toned confession when, in an almost masochistic manner, he persuaded himself to go to a particularly antipathetic priest to take his confession during Easter. That finds a parallel in the 'prayer' of St. Francesco Borgia in Vol. 3 (*Escorial*) of the *St. Orpheus Breviary* as he paints himself in merciless words while kneeling on a prayer stool in front of Emperor Charles V. Szentkuthy provided a self-portrait more than once, but was, perhaps, the most apposite. I often find myself face to face with him as I come to realize the full truth of every word he uttered: he lived beyond everything, and what one side considered little was to the other side too much:

...Next to the Pope I shall be the Antichrist, a selfish Narcissus beside a wife, the prodigal son in his parents' house, the braggart and traitor among friends, the democrat monkey among dukes, the scarecrow of refinement next to peasants... an aristocratic dilettante among writers, a raving anti-aesthete in the eyes of artists...⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Marginalia on Casanova* (New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2013) 38.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4. The "Vita" was not part of the original edition of the book but was written for the second Hungarian edition, published in 1972.

⁴⁷ *Szent Orpheus Breviáriuma III, Eszkoriál*, 2nd edn. (Budapest: Magvető, 1972) 347.

Since we are on the subject of confession, let mention also be made of his biographical fantasy of Mozart, first printed in Hungary in 1957 under the title *Divertimento. Változatok Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart életére* [Variations on the Life of W. A. Mozart], in which one may read the famous ironic pseudo-confession, a long, spiteful, sarcastic indictment against the young Mozart by the Archbishop of Salzburg. And in *Narcisszus tükre* [Narcissus' Mirror], which first saw the light of day in 1933, is chronologically very close to the novel *Prae*, having been started shortly before publication of the latter in 1934, though it fits better with the dramatic tone of *Az egyetlen metafora felé* [Towards the One and Only Metaphor] of 1935. It is a full-scale novel and equally a 'Catalogus rerum,' moreover an inventory of a love experienced interiorly (clinging to family, friends, and relatives, love, sex, and the search for God by a transcendent paramour), and a great many other forms of love on a multi-colored table of Szentkuthy's coordinate system of diary-like outbursts of emotions:

I stand in front of two epic extremes: impressionistic blobs and an organized whole. For me time or my fear of death... they make both impossible... I cannot recount fragments of a life, whereas my 'monumental' monologues, by virtue of the fact that they are inflated, agglutinated circlets of the present, are in fact also open, unfinished in every direction, and therefore kindred to fragments ... ; I therefore most resemble the 'whole' style of the whole of nature, that is how the outside world can flow best between my lines, and that is how my lines can escape from me the most imperceptibly among the facts of the outside world.⁴⁸

The diary notes of *Towards the One and Only Metaphor* were written in one go during the summer of 1934 and published the following year, and moreover with the explicit intention of letting people see, after the *furor* which had greeted *Prae*, that he was a creature of flesh and blood, not some species of homunculus. The object of the book is to assemble a *Catalogus rerum*, an 'index of entities' — a pretension which cannot be accomplished except by employing a broad perspective of view and simultaneous experiencing of tiny realities: "I ought to stress that I am not striving for a response to the absolute truth; for me the essence lies in taking a note of the issues as clearly and as completely as possible."⁴⁹ In fact, it was the first display of the diary man; as in *Prae*, that diary aspect is discernible only in its atoms,

⁴⁸ *Narcisszus tükre* [Narcissus' Mirror] (Budapest: Magvető, 1995)

⁴⁹ See FC, XVI "Ikon — Erotikon — Logikon," 433.

but even *Metaphor* was more a garland of thoughts “on the way towards some kind of summation,” and as he himself notes, its chief characteristic is analysis. It is touching how bitterly outspoken he was in the statement he made about it in *Frivolities & Confessions*:

I should note that the path leading towards the one and only metaphor is certainly a bumpy one, it was not over a silk carpet, that's for sure.... I am a figure roaming around in an endless stream of ignoramuses, striving towards that certain 'one and only metaphor.'⁵⁰

To that can be added his concept of “The essence of my life is wonder”⁵¹ and “the sole valid attitude to the incomprehensible universe is one of humility” because that, too, spurred Szentkuthy into writing up his diary every day for decades on end.

In an interview he gave to Gábor Bányai, which first appeared in the June 1988 issue of the journal *Tiszatáj* [Tisza Region], he made the astonishing utterance that “my entire huge journal is a dance of death...” One can only make a guess at what he wanted to suggest by that: he goes round every figure in his diary, he keeps everyone fatefully before his eyes, or he keeps fate in sight, or views everything ‘*sub specie mortis et aeterni*’?⁵² In the first chapter of *Frivolities & Confessions*, he writes in detail about all the things he was seeking to achieve with that autobiographical confession, and there he does, indeed, denote a dance of death as one of its astonishing genres.

Of course, connected to the diary notes of *Towards the One and Only Metaphor* from the viewpoint of style and the writer's intention are the second part of that book as well as its other continuation in the form of *Az alázat kalendárium* [The Almanac of Humility], which was written in the summer of 1936 but not published until 1998. Section 18 of the latter, entitled in Hungarian and in English in the original text: “My Married Life with Rembrandt — *Házaseletem Rembrandttal*,”⁵³ is especially noteworthy. It's as if the analysis of art, which is the background, had taken center stage, and we become witnesses of how a real-life marriage was lived through; as each one gets to know his or her partner, even to the point of boredom, they also come to value the other's admirable side. Rembrandt is irritated by the bad habit his partner has of repeating a thought, getting to feel it as

⁵⁰ FC, XIII, 396.

⁵¹ Report of Marianne Dobos, *Új Tükör*, March 1984; *Az élet faggatottja* (Budapest: Hamvas Intézet 2006).

⁵² ‘From the viewpoint of death and eternity.’

⁵³ *Az alázat kalendárium* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1998) 56–86.

being an unbearable perseveration. He watches her attentively, analyzing and exploring why she does what she does; he knows her so well by then that in many cases, he understands even her failures of understanding, and vice versa. On the whole, though, he loves her very much and would be unable to give her up. Experiencing everything concerning Rembrandt gives rise to a rather intriguing diary perspective.

Not long after came *Ágoston olvasása közben*.⁵⁴ There is no question that Szentkuthy intended this to be the second volume of the *St. Orpheus Breviary*. He makes it clear in *Frivolities & Confessions* that in the 1938 prospectus for the 'Black Orpheus Booklets,' giving a terse summary of the work ("While Reading Augustine marks a balancing point of antique myth, the Old Testament, and Christianity, and finally a summing up of European history"), that this was the next planned installment. He actually wrote it in 1939, a year after completing *Marginalia on Casanova*, the first book of the *Breviary*, as became clear from its very first sentence. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he had actually finished it, as may be deduced from the strikingly apposite wording of the above-quoted 'plan' in the prospectus (and in retrospect from knowledge of the full text). Thus, in all likelihood, he wrote it in 1938 and at the time the prospectus was put out he had already written his notes on *Augustine*, or at least he had a very definite picture of the conceptual structure of the work.

Thus, when the parts of the *St. Orpheus Breviary* appeared from 1939–42 and 1972–84, not one of the volumes made room for *While Reading Augustine*, which is well-nigh incomprehensible given that Szentkuthy spent a huge amount of time throughout his life in dealing with St. Augustine. To mention just three (albeit symbolically important) locations: 1) in the foreword to *Frivolities & Confessions*,⁵⁵ as a lead-in, an invocation of the genre of confessions; 2) his essay "St Orpheus' Encounter with the Archangel St Michael," which is about poet Mihály Babits;⁵⁶ and 3) a passage from his unpublished novel *Dogmák és démonok* ('Dogmas and Demons').⁵⁷ With regard to the details, let me quote the author directly:

⁵⁴ *Ágoston olvasása közben* (Pécs: Jelenkor, 1993).

⁵⁵ FC, I, 7–16.

⁵⁶ In the volume *Muzsák testamentuma* [Testament of the Muses] 421–423. Babits was a generation older than Szentkuthy (1883–1941). He was a leading literary figure, poet, writer and translator in pre-war Hungary.

⁵⁷ Many parts of this were published in different literary journals. For instance, see *Jelenkor* [Present Age] No. 4 (April 1987) 322–323

Lóránt Kabdebó: Excuse me, but did you say the 'Augustine' is ready?

Miklós Szentkuthy: No, it isn't. It's an unfinished MS. Those commentaries on Augustine do not refer to his confessions but I produced them while I was reading *De civitate Dei* and *De Trinitate*.⁵⁸ What stimulated me to write was the fact that these subjects did not give Augustine occasion for abstract contemplation but forced him into deep immersion in the stormy history and stormy philosophies of his age (the Roman Empire was the model for *The City of God*). Thus, I announced the brochure giving the title of *While Reading Augustine*, which subsequently did not appear. I prepared masses of notes on *De civitate Dei*, but unfortunately they were in pencil. At that time I acquired almost the entire oeuvre of St. Augustine in German, and what's more I read them all. It was not the *Confessions* that interested me so much as his other great theological works.

LK: Are those just notes? Is there no running text?

MSz: They are marginal notes, but there is a running text. As far as St. Augustine is concerned, even later on, at the time of writing the 'Black Orpheus Booklets,' I read him passionately from one end to the other. His baroque style, that fantastic, metaphoric North African manner with the Latin language, was extraordinarily congenial to me! Even now I could still brand this conversation, on behalf of Augustine, by defining it as a *furious recollection*...⁵⁹

That expression, "extraordinarily congenial," will often come to mind when reading many of his descriptions, interior monologues, free verse, and emotional outbursts with their diary throb. It will be no surprise to anyone who is even just a little bit familiar with Szentkuthy that the work is not just about Augustine but also about himself. That's right, himself! Not in any navel-gazing manner, just imbedded in his own history. It is a series of reflections on the philosophy of history and religion and of a strongly existentialist inspiration, its various temporal strata becoming distinct:

⁵⁸ *City of God* (AD 413–422) and *On the Trinity* (c. AD 417).

⁵⁹ See FC, XV "Szent Orpheus Breviárumát hangolja lantján" [St. Orpheus Tunes his Breviary on his Lute], 406–7.

Augustine and the Roman Empire;
Szentkuthy and the Second World War;
the present-reader and present-day bloody realities, civil wars,
invasions, wars of independence;

Christianity and Graeco-Roman mythology — a relationship deliberately left until last, because of the effect exerted on Szentkuthy by Eckhart Peterich's book *Die Theologie der Hellenen*. That the puritanical simplicity of the "Black Orpheus Booklets" had been inspired by the external appearance and simple vignette of that book (many were the times I heard his laudations of that vignette over the decade we worked together, the continual presence in his memory bank of Przywara's book on Augustine⁶⁰ and Peterich on Greece — that was one of the far from negligible influences if one was aware of Szentkuthy's reverential affinity for books with a modern make-up ("voluptuously tangible")). Another matter was of no lesser importance than forming the crux of the Augustine reading diary was that the comparison of Christianity and Graeco-Roman mythology, even, where possible, their fusion, almost threw Szentkuthy's notion of God into ecstasies of religious fantasy. I think there is no need for me to underline the inordinately modern character of all this, the set of free or pseudo-free associations, and the conceptual montage. This is the point on which the *While Reading Augustine* MS ends, or rather breaks off.⁶¹

A further book of metastatical diaristic character is the novel *Bianca Lanza di Casalanza*,⁶² which was written in 1947 and appeared for the first time in 1994. It is known that Bianca was based on an existing person in Szentkuthy's circle of acquaintances. The story is shot through with humor but also, in parallel, with sadness and anguish. Needless to say, it is also not a raw diary, but there are many places where one feels events and meetings that did actually occur have been strung into the novel. It is an evocation of the games in a *commedia dell'arte*, which, on its own admission, were called on to make the age forget its heart-wrenching everyday fears. One of the novel's highlights is when the main protagonist gets out a secondary-school textbook on mineralogy then, on studying each of the minerals in turn, was attracted by their, for Szentkuthy, highly imaginative descriptions, with their delineations of human character. The base of this description is a great vision of the unity of the universe inspired by Paracelsus. But this "one and only

⁶⁰ Erich Przywara (1889–1972) was a German theologian, a Jesuit strongly influenced by Augustine, who was highly influential in Europe.

⁶¹ As it was, *While Reading Augustine*, as edited by me, was published by the Pécs-based publisher Jelenkor in 1993.

⁶² *Bianca Lanza di Casalanza* (Pécs: Jelenkor, 1994).

metaphor” with the images and similes become a many-sided highly colored kaleidoscope.

If someone were to write just the life story of brimstone, with a thorough awareness of all the of deep psychology and physiology, even so, as a tireless critic and insatiable poet, then one would find oneself confronted with a work so splendid that it would at last advance to a very large degree the fusion of humankind and nature... fluid, crystal obelisk and pulp, that how they flit around in the life story, those are the emotions or, if you prefer, the illnesses of sulphur. Sentimental savageries of lethal appendicitis, thickening sulphur stew, and love’s heart-sores will probably be interchangeable notions in the work that haunted the dreams of the author under the title of Bianca and the Life Story of Brimstone.⁶³

A mix of finished and unfinished writing appears here with brilliant, playful inventiveness: the novel’s frame story is the intention of an artist (the author himself) to set to writing a literary work (he descends to the ‘cellar prison of creation’) in order to take stock of the models of his pictures. He searches for the female models, with one chapter after another, from one incident to another, the painter all the time wishing to make a start on his book. By the time the reader has got to the end of the novel, however, he is still fiddling with a beginning for his own writing.

Especially worth noting is Betta, possibly the most important female figure in Szentkuthy’s life, the immortalization of whom runs through practically his entire literary output. Many colorful, film-like representations can be traced in *While Reading Augustine*:

I saw Betta was pleased. How I marveled at and envied her. Oh world, you were begotten for my joy, after all! You are the greatest! She frolicked like a puppy-dog, jumping up like transparent, days-old leaves in a breeze; she chuckled, a drunken shivering plane tree. And how alien I was in the whole scene, like a gallows tree, the sketch of which is unsoftened by skirt-fluttering clouds.⁶⁴

On the stormy course of their love and the threatening proximity of war:

Everything is inside one; a person can only talk with himself, with God, and with Betta... What was that year, that *civitas temporis et*

⁶³ Bianca Lanza di Casalanza (Pécs: Jelenkor, 1994) 199.

⁶⁴ Ágoston olvasása közben (Pécs: Jelenkor, 1993) 72.

futilitatis,⁶⁵ the sole glass, the paltry *poculum*⁶⁶ from which the everlasting is drinkable? It was that of Betta, of Bible-reading, of the bloody proximity of history.⁶⁷

In the Bianca novel, Szentkuthy gives two whole chapters of vehement descriptions of almost sculpture-in-the-round savagery. Chapter 2 is about Betta, and at the end of Chapter 7, with the title of “Escaping to Webster,” he compiles a series of “colored, demonic Betta pictures, an infernally colorful identification with the Duchess of Malfi...” A novella given the title ‘Let’s Call Venice’ provides the story of how they got to know each other with the emotional closeness of a diary.

He was still evoking, almost visualizing Betta, in 1949, at the beginning of the darkest hours of the Rákosi-led Communist dictatorship in Hungary, in *Bezárult Európa* (Europe is Closed), a novel not published until the turn of the millennium:

... [T]here was a time when I wanted to write a book on Purple Diana... It happened to be Christmas-time when the purplest purple dress of my rainbow-skeletal heroine came to mind: from soft material, wadding and violet, fur and sea, bluebell and a kiss transformed into fishing smack in a new Ovid.⁶⁸

Chiming with that is a remark that he had written three years previously in connection with Dulac’s Arabian Nights images: “... he had always wanted to write about Betta as ‘The Purple Diana’...” And in *Pendragon és XIII. Apolló*,⁶⁹ Szentkuthy seemingly could not free himself of his magnetic attraction to Betta: He elevates her into a vicissitude-laden fairytale vision. Fair-looking, but evil, red-haired King Pendragon Uher in the middle of the novel changes into a gorgeous lady with flowing red locks who is none other than Satan.

If one leafs through the books of his library, full of marginal notes as they are, one likewise comes across references to Betta. For example, in one picture album,⁷⁰ around a picture of ‘S. Elisabetta e S. Francesco,’ he looped the following extremely desperate and terse, notes: “Betta only died for me. 2.XI.1967, Betta: 1937→1967 = 30 years * Betta left me — the causes...” Then, unexpectedly, on p.

⁶⁵ ‘Community of time and futility.’

⁶⁶ ‘Cup, goblet.’

⁶⁷ Ibid., 78.

⁶⁸ *Bezárult Európa* (Budapest: Magvető, 2000) 146.

⁶⁹ *Pendragon and Apollo XIII*, written in 1946–47 (Budapest: Magvető, 2008).

⁷⁰ Angela Ottino-Della Chiesa *Pittura lombarda del Quattrocento* (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d’arti grafiche, 1961).

61 of a 1943 edition of *Der Tod des Empedokles* (The Death of Empedocles) under two underlined lines of Empedocles' text,⁷¹ he placed the monogram "M + B." In the early Fifties, the Rákosi regime deported Betta to a small village in northern Hungary:

I was a witness to her deportation. How would I be able assist her? I gave her a volume of the complete correspondence of Keats, and also my German family Bible, reproductions of all of El Greco's paintings and the many, many volumes of the *Arabian Nights*... From the Chinese album she also got a vase, a proud envoy of her character, her psychology, her eroticism, and her religiosity. The most classical Chinese amphora, the magic green, the light, the nights, the glaze, and moonlight of the deep seas, with a plant on it which was maybe a water palm or an analogous lonely plant with ink-painted lotus leaves, the harmonious crown of perverse dreams.⁷²

The parts of the diary that became accessible will show how much more can be added to Szentkuthy's already multilayered, ecstatic portrait of Betta.

During what in Hungary were the extraordinarily fraught politically times of 1949, Szentkuthy started writing a historical fantasy that was supposed to be the story of the aged Tarquinius Superbus, the seventh and last king of Rome, but he only got to page 50. There, in the middle of a line, separated only by the word 'Interlude,' it transforms into a diary, but remains a novel, sometimes directly, sometimes metastatically, until the very end. It soon became clear that this was completely inappropriate for literature; in the incipient dictatorship he was incapable of writing anything other than a diary. It was for that reason the title *Bezárult Európa* (Europe is Closed) was given to the text.⁷³ Even so, there were protagonists and events in mask, in hyperbole, and in wonderful descriptions, where one may discern his own biography, shocking events, etc. As revealed in the diary, the writing of *Europe is Closed* was dramatically interrupted on September 7, 1949, just after he returned from a trip to London, initially funded by the Hungarian state. Till now, what caused this terrible interlude was unknown, something never previously revealed by Szentkuthy in any of his memoirs or interviews. On that day,

⁷¹ "Treues Herz, / Ich habe wehe dir getan, ich wollt' / Es nicht" (True heart, / I have done ill of you! I wished / That not — from near the start of Scene 3).

⁷² According to the account given in *FC*, Chapter XXIII, p. 647, Szentkuthy picked the vases from an album that he owned to characterize various individuals. Cf. Robert Lockhart Hobson, *Chinesische Kunstwerke* (Berlin: Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, A.G, 1927), a German translation of Robert Lockhart Hobson, *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain* (London & New York, etc.: Cassell & Co., 1915) 2 vols.

⁷³ *Bezárult Európa* [Europe is Closed] (Budapest: Magvető, 2000).

he received an official letter of dismissal from the school where he was a professor. Additionally, he also learned that, along with other people in the Budagyöngye-Hüvösvölgy quarter, where bourgeois and civilian families lived, he would most probably be dislodged from his villa, deprived of his library (books collected since he was six years old), and forced to live in a hovel, a fate which many of that quarter did in fact suffer and from which there was possibly no return. Recall the lot of Betta, noted above, who was a victim of that very purge, deported as she was to a far village, ruined physically and spiritually. As Szentkuthy had no work and no money, he became a “skiver of public danger” (a stigmatization of the Rákosi-regime that would enable them to imprison whomever they wished). Fearing the worst and most deplorable of circumstances, Szentkuthy didn’t want his daughter Mariella to return from Switzerland since he knew that, if she did, her life would be severely compromised, if not endangered, and she could very well suffer a fate similar, or worse, to that of Betta. All of these fears and anxieties are expressed in part of *Europe is Closed*. After receiving such news, it changed the tone and tenor of the novel, which became wild, at times rife with descriptions of agony, fear, infuriated sentiments, etc., such as in this representative passage:

My pupils have been taken from me, despite my having sacrificed the most productive spring of my life for them; and they were fond of me as their scholarly ‘accomplice’ and eternally droll pal... My readers have been taken from me, and my books have been hidden under the blind bushel of the devil; my students, to whom I dispensed my lessons from a *burning teacher’s platform* with all the intoxicatingly happy histrionics of an Alsdorf,⁷⁴ secularly and with the faith of a born founder of a religion.’ (85)

Before embarking on writing *Euridiké nyomában*⁷⁵ [In the Footsteps of Eurydice], the tenth and last volume of the *St. Orpheus Breviary*, on 6 April 1986 (at the start of a period of rejuvenated creativity following hospitalization), Szentkuthy began writing a workbook that thereafter he would only refer to by title as ‘April 6th, 1986,’ as though he were wishing thereby to perpetuate the haste in which he had set off on it. This workbook contains only preparatory notes for the work in progress, and in July 1988 it expanded to three notebooks, from which many parts were taken over by him in the definitive text of *In the Footsteps of Eurydice*. But whenever the question came up of why had he put a 50-year blockage on inspection

⁷⁴ Károly Alsdorf-Pfisterer, a professional actor of some repute, was a paternal great-uncle of Szentkuthy’s.

⁷⁵ (Budapest: Magvető, 1993).

of his diary — it was such an unconscionably long period — he waved that aside and even instructed me: “After I have died it will be possible to show people *April 6th, 1986*; it’s not blocked, even if it is a diary.” Of course, he was well aware that this was something of a misrepresentation as the 600 pages of the three notebooks are just a series of notes that cannot be published as they stand: a list of pictures found in books on the visual arts that ‘one day’ he was going to incorporate into the work, memos from which he would ‘one day’ pluck bits here and there for the work-in-progress, etc. ‘Showing’ would not be very rewarding, giving at best only points of reference for that work and so only be of philological value.

A good example of a network of connections running through Szentkuthy’s oeuvre is the thread relating to Eurydice that crops up near the very beginning of the introductory section of Volume I of the *St. Orpheus Breviary*:

the marble tablet ... depicted the scene when Orpheus has to leave his wife in the underworld — every thinker’s thought is his wife, and he always has to leave her behind in the underworld...⁷⁶

He professed repeatedly that the identity of Eurydice was the main conceptual element of Volume 10: *Euridiké nyomában* (In the Footsteps of Eurydice) of the *Breviary*, which was left unfinished at his death. He also said that all the female figures who have a part in Monteverdi’s opera *L’Orfeo* (SV 318) make an appearance in his own book: La Musica, La Ninfa, La Messaggiera, La Speranza, La Eco, et cetera — each corresponded to a woman in his own life. Eurydice was the sole one who was not a figure in his own life but was his entire life’s work! In that light, the unfinished ‘Orpheus’ work of an Orpheus-Szentkuthy who does, after all, vanish in the footsteps of Eurydice, can be viewed as having been paradoxically finished.

As will have become evident from what has been said already, the whole oeuvre demonstrates continuity, a diary life, the tone of a diary. And plentiful notations of a daily nature are to be found not just in his published works but also in the margins of the books in his library. In his will he stipulated that the diaries deposited with the Petőfi Literary Museum were closely connected with the annotations that filled the margins of the books in his library:⁷⁷ “I have another

⁷⁶ “*Vita* (Life of a Saint): Alfonso Maria di Liguori,” in: *Marginalia on Casanova*, 3–4.

⁷⁷ An essay about that library appeared in an elegant brochure, written by Márta Parragi, a research fellow at PIM, to mark the centenary of Szentkuthy’s birth in 2008.

‘gigantic diary’ in the marginalia which can be found in my books and albums!”⁷⁸
Consider this passage from *Frivolities & Confessions*:

For that matter I could fill a book with my marginal notes: I scribble thoughts, spur-of-the-moment diary sketches, and cross-references all over my books. That is the starting point for all my works, the first day of creation. I also record the materials for the diary that occur as I am reading, because that way it becomes polyphonic, Dolly has burned the sprouts to the pan! Let everyday life creep into the miniatures! That way they become colorful and rich.⁷⁹

His wide reading was seemingly shot through and through by his bibliomania, when on his writing table and on chairs all round he would be surrounded by already read and annotated books or those that were still waiting to be read; with those marginal notes, in his own way, he brought that unparalleled library to life. That was why he considered it important to stipulate in his will that his library be left intact after his death.⁸⁰

Despite the meticulous and comprehensive philological work that has been done on Szentkuthy’s documents, diary notes can still be found in the most tucked-away crannies. They are on all manner of subjects, their chief characteristic being to get to the essence, to create compact wording, and to record a multiplicity of dates (the latter in all likelihood are references to the appropriate places in the huge diary). There are points where he argues with himself: sometimes years later, with a date being given, he discovers he has been mistaken, reveals the error or a hasty pronouncement, and berates himself... On other occasions he simply reinforces an earlier opinion with a single word, but it often happened that he gave vent to harsh views on a thought or person featured in a book he had been reading. He would always, with philological punctiliousness, provide a date for his note:

My library is an organic part of my giant diary; on the pages of my books are dates, references to the diary, as well as references in the diary to the book in question, a picture, or a footnote. It is not that

⁷⁸ FC, XX, 556.

⁷⁹ FC, XXII *Elementa inspirationis*, 605–6.

⁸⁰ The library has now been catalogued by Márta Parragi with my assistance. In the database we generated, special entries have been made both for the shorter notes and for the more deeply dwelling, diary-like comments. Fully processing those would be an extraordinarily interesting task for, say, a graduate seeking to complete a Ph.D. thesis — though almost certainly to make a good job of it all is going to require several years of work, if not longer.

without my library my diary would be incomprehensible, but it would only be half as useful.⁸¹

A few examples of marginal notes that can be found in albums:

The legend of St. Alexius of Rome was particularly dear to him, the motif appearing even in an analysis of *King Lear* that he delivered in 1947 to the then-extant Free University in Budapest.⁸² It seems that by then, in the 1960s, the saint had become one of the chief metaphors for his own fate (in the *Lear* analysis he compares the disguised Earl of Kent to the saint). One learns from *The Lives of the Saints* that Saint Alexius, the only son of a wealthy Christian Roman senator, in protest against a marriage they had arranged for him, secretly quit Rome on his wedding-night. Disguised as a beggar, he lived near a church in Edessa, Mesopotamia, later returning to Rome as an actual beggar. His parents did not recognize him, but let him stay in the castle that was their home with Alexis living for seventeen years in a corner under the stairs. Only after he died did his family find in his hands a Bible he had been given by his Mother and a note on his body which told them that he was their dearly loved and long-awaited son. In one of Szentkuthy's profusely annotated albums,⁸³ next to a painting by Bonifacio Bembo⁸⁴ that depicts St. Alexius, he wrote the following marginal note: "24.XI.1967. Without question I am a literary St. Alexius, *ignotus*..."⁸⁵ Underneath that, as a counterpoint, and with a touch of what feels like a sigh of release about the remark: "Summer 1973: My *Orpheus* has appeared in full!"⁸⁶

⁸¹ FC, 9.

⁸² Miklós Szentkuthy, "Lear, az őrült pipacs" [Lear, the Mad Poppy] *Orpheus*, Vol. V, No. 1 (1994) 121–38; *Varázskert* [Magic Garden] (Budapest: Hamvas Intézet, 2012) 95.

⁸³ Angela Ottino-Della Chiesa, *Pittura lombarda del Quattrocento* (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d'arti grafiche, 1961).

⁸⁴ An Italian artist (c. 1420–active around Brescia until 1477) whose paintings are now held by the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

⁸⁵ 'Unnoticed.'

⁸⁶ In 1973, two volumes containing the first seven parts of *St. Orpheus Breviary* were published by the major state-run publisher Magvető, with the first volume containing: 1. *Marginalia on Casanova*; 2. *Black Renaissance*; 3. *El Escorial*; 4. *Europa Minor*; and with the second volume containing: 5. *Cynthia*; 6. *Confession and Puppet Show*; 7. *The Second Life of Silvester II*.

In the same place, next to a miniature from a choir book of the *Annunciation to the Virgin* (odd little dwelling and a total lack of perspective), he says this:⁸⁷

1. VIII. 1973. Long live the complete lack of historical fidelity! Long live the Juan Gris type of cubism! fantasy Gothic! a million variations on a theme! flower stem columns, half, pseudo, good and bad engineer-prick perspectives; analyze the reason for, and origins of, this architecture!

On page 44 one re-encounters Belbello: a sheet of vellum illustrating *The Creation of Eve*⁸⁸ (a scene in a Paradise surrounded by an extraordinary profusion of motifs animals and stylized plants):

4. IX. 1967. Sex! Dürer: Marginal Drawings For Emperor Maximilian's Prayer Book! The whole of Nature! Surrealist fantasy: Magda's flower paintings, my terrace, Summer 1967; heraldry; a rose-colored rock; Salvador Dali, rock, rose, my heart. This earthly world is for sure a prototype of the hereafter otherwise why would it have been worth creating in the first place?

Szentkuthy nursed a dream that his biographical novels, which are indeed full-scale novels, would appear one day under the collective title of *Önarckép álarcokban* [Self-portrait in Masks] — not plural self-portraits but a single self-portrait, a cycle condensed into a monolith, with the main protagonist of every single novel yet at the same time brilliantly achieving an authentic portrait of each given artist (of Mozart in *Divertimento*, of Goethe in *Arc és álarc* [Face and Mask], of Haydn in *Doktor Haydn*, of Dürer in *Saturnus fia* [Son of Saturn], and of George Frederick Handel in *Händel*). More than that, one discovers that it is not just these five biographical novels that belong to that emotional-conceptual-confessional-diaryistic generic category but, for instance, he himself writes in one of his letters that the portrait of the painter Lucas Cranach in the novel *Wittenberg* may also be perceived as a masked self-portrait. It is likewise easy to pronounce that in many of its details, *Cicero's Journeyman Years* is also a self-portrait; indeed, even *Narcissus' Mirror* is a self-portrait in disguise, including both a great deal of diary detail and character portraits both of himself and his father. The father bore down very heavily on the young Miklós Pfisterer, and there are plentiful portraits as well as reflections about him and about love, and a *catalogus rerum* of inexpressible

⁸⁷ By an Italian early-Renaissance illuminator Luchino Belbello da Pavia. His painting is now held by the Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence.

emotional attractions uniting *Robert Barokk*, *Narcissus' Mirror*, *Europe Is Closed*, *Divertimento*, and *Frivolities & Confessions*.

Marginalia on Casanova occupies a place of honor among the ten volumes that make up the *St. Orpheus Breviary*. We have to recognize how in many places he identifies himself with Casanova, — not by all means concerning the eroticism, but rather in a psychological, spiritual, and intellectual comparison. Already with his first paragraph:

He is a descendant of actors. That is decisive and important before all else.... The most primal principle of life is theatrical... That is what history is too; that is the darkest instinct of life.... If I were not myself descended from an actor ancestor, I would not believe in my existence...⁸⁹

Yet another identification is:

... Casanova is in fact more than once on the verge of passing out. These long-continued periods of continence attended him for a goodly stretch of his life, though always leaving the coruscating paradox of increasing sensuality, an increasing dance of death.⁹⁰

And at the very start of his biography of Alfonso Maria di Liguori, in 1972, when Szentkuthy was 64, he wrote the following, and it seems to have been a self-confession, too:

...[A]lthough he was able to formulate with the greatest ease, he never amended, or even tried to correct himself; thoughts and sentiment just poured out of him like incessant rain, now simply, now in a baroque fashion, but behind his matchless stylistic flair raged huge passions, both sorrows and joys, regarding the fate of God, the soul and unfathomable body of men, the purpose or unacceptable purposelessness of history.⁹¹

One can take a whole series of passages in the later parts of *Orpheus* and discover a huge array of identifications of character and tiny sketches of reality: Francesco Borgia (in Vol. I./part 3. of the *Breviary: El Escorial*), Pope (St.) Celestine V (Vol. IV/part 9: Bloody Ass), and in many places in *Cynthia* (i.e., Vol. II./part 5.).

Véres számár [Bloody Ass], Vol. IV/part 9 of the *Breviary*, was written in 1980–82. My own recollection is of the autumn of 1980: I accompanied him on a

⁸⁹ *Marginalia on Casanova* 26.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

visit to a hospital clinic for some X-rays; we were in the basement, with him lying on a stretcher, waiting for an ambulance to take him back to the hospital in Uzsoki Street. We had to spend some singularly uncomfortable hours in that gloomy, oppressive basement with him just half-covered by dirty tatters of blankets under hissing pipes. All of a sudden, I happened to glimpse a poster rather like a wall newspaper. Wonders never cease! — it was advertising a fashion show for those who worked in the clinic. Whether that was cause for laughing or crying, I pointed it out to Miklós. It was a scene he later put into *Bloody Ass*, but it was done in such a crafty fashion that one could easily believe it was just typical of Szentkuthy's exaggerations and fantasy because it was out of the question that anything like that had happened.

Katalin Liptay (Hungarian Radio) prepared with Szentkuthy a report in the spring of 1988, on the appearance of the publication of the edited interviews entitled *Frivolitások és hitvallások* [Frivolities & Confessions]. The writer makes an interesting admission there: by virtue of the psychoanalytic nature of the diary, he is drawn to the very bottom. As he discloses:

... I have yet another vision: I am swimming up to my neck at great speed in the water of life, naturally with reflections of stars, woods, and plants, and with fish poking about, but I am not an astronomer or forestry expert or architect.... I am simply splashing about in the water of life.

My literary work is arranged on three steps or three stages, as it were. On the lowest step is the giant diary that I have been keeping regularly for almost half a century. I started writing regularly around 1939, at the outbreak of the Second World War. By now it has truly expanded to take up tens of thousands of sides... Anyway, the three levels of my life's work: 1) the diary, the level of the depths, which has a parallel with the first circle in Dante's *Inferno*. In this case hell does not denote suffering or sin but penetration to the deepest things of life, the deepest of depths, the underworld, the striving for the origin of life and essential matters like that; 2) the middle level is parallel with Dante's *Purgatory*, the place of cleansing or expiation. That is *Frivolities & Confessions*... In that I have already distanced myself from the deepest of depths and am headed for the work.... 3) The third step is my work of art, *St. Orpheus Breviary*, which finds its parallel in Dante's *Paradiso*.

The diary, therefore, is the deepest of depths, hiding away, taking one toward the complicated maze of inchoate practice, and he illustrates that inferno with his own instantaneousness and crudeness, his surrendering of himself, and at the same time by his closing the diary (though the explanation should not be left as

simple as that — in his case the very composedness of the diary makes his surrendering of himself, the completeness of confession, questionable). Nevertheless, Szentkuthy gave preference to the diary form, memoirs being foreign to him as a genre. A memoir is a settled, edited recollection, a winking-out of the past from its hiding-places, and however analytical it might be, it would take shortcuts, like a well-regulated river, but then what might a well-regulated maze look like? — Szentkuthy, as I have already indicated, felt more comfortable in a permanent present. With his own frequent resort to anachronisms, with their often piquant simultaneous events, he also endeavored to turn the taped recordings of *Frivolities & Confessions* into the present tense and thus, to some degree, to shape it as a diary: he would perpetually break off the recording with a series of analyses from a reading diary, or his elation of how a day passed (that would be pure diary material!), or in order to his explain way of working, or to list the sources of his inspiration...

Whenever something happened in the ordinary course of our lives, whether that were something only of importance that day or a world-shattering event, I can almost picture him, tall as he was but with a fairly modest shoe size,⁹² as he would toddle over to his bookshelves or writing desk, on which his diary would be lying in readiness, he would immediately record the event in question, the notebook of the diary drawing him to it by magic, with him keeping up an intimate, dependent relationship to it as if for him it were an important living creature, a life-partner or drug without which he would be incapable of living.

In the course of his diary-like recordings, Szentkuthy would sense the duality of the infinitude of the cosmos and the closeness of minute epiphanies; that, I cannot emphasize strongly enough, was one of his chief characteristics: on the one hand, to see from a distant perspective (“from light-years away in the cosmos”) and getting one to see one’s frailty, yet on the other hand, to openly accept the risk of deep vulnerability which inevitably attends experiencing the shadowy and radiant motifs of life in their sympathetic resonance with the most minute realities. In *Frivolities & Confessions*, an interesting conversation was recorded about how he endured the cloddish demagoguery and cruel party dictatorship of the Rákosi regime in Hungary:⁹³

It is not meant as idle chatter when I emphasize that I live with ... distant stellar constellations... From *that* huge perspective, from among such backdrops, please don’t take it as boastfulness on my

⁹² European 42, British or American 7.5–8.

⁹³ The period of 1948–56.

part that on such a small territory I can't take a historical period like that too tragically... I was one of the regime's victims ... but that way of looking at things has consequences for one's general state of health and character: those few years of dictatorship ... were an insignificant miniature, a weekend compared with the milliards of years of the universe. It would be ridiculous for me to speak about *sub specie aeterni*⁹⁴ and meanwhile whine on about tragedy...⁹⁵

In a review of Szentkuthy's 1936 novel *A Chapter About Love*, Antal Szerb wrote:

Szentkuthy ascribes a certain dual function to every phenomenon of this world... Everything is double: on the one hand, a geometrical figure oversimplified to the utmost, or a self-elucidating paradox, but then on the other hand, everything is lush, complicated, primitive vegetation... In consequence, his literary activity also divides into two functions: on the one hand, a search for the ultimate, simple essence of things..., and on the other, analysis of infinite richness, so as to record the total vegetative properties of things.⁹⁶

Anyone who has kept a diary will be clear about how much time and energy it consumes; it can more or less leach a person if one wishes to write it up regularly. How on earth did he manage to pull it off! András Kepes wrote that he was a two-story man; he kept a diary and he also wrote novels,⁹⁷ and making good use of time was, in fact, one of the aspects of Szentkuthy's life, with diary-writing almost automatically filling every minute. He got up at cockcrow, and that was when he would note down in the diary the events of the previous day, taking into account both his personal experiences, such as the fantasy he had had after the life of a saint he and I had read out after lunch! He would accomplish that extremely productive work in a near-miraculous fashion as he never showed any sign of working feverishly, except sometimes when he had a novel or essay to write, and then writing would exhaust him, whenever I went into his library room as a rule, in an unruffled manner, he would invite me to join him for a chat, and if I protested that I did not wish to trouble him longer than I needed to, he would still offer me a seat, and for me that easy-going invitation was a tangible point of the magic.

⁹⁴ See footnote 41.

⁹⁵ FC, XII, 340.

⁹⁶ Originally published in the journal *Valóság* [Reality] No. 9 (1936); reprinted in *A mítosz mítosza. In memoriam Szentkuthy Miklós*, ed. Gyula Rugási (Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 2001) 47–50.

⁹⁷ *Stúdió '81–'84*; RTV Minerva, 1986.

Szentkuthy's character and life's work was an anatomical drawing of the complexity of human life. After all, however deeply a human soul attempts to lodge himself in nature at large, however much energy is brought to bear, it will not be in one's power to achieve simplicity, that is what is mirrored not just by Szentkuthy's diary but, like demonstrating a big labyrinth, by his entire oeuvre. We await from simple, pellucid, divine structures, from distant ultimate truths, an illumination of our chaotic interiors, incapable of decision and full of doubts as they often are, and that they will crystallize the troubled fluids of our soul. A definition of beauty laid out in *Frivolities & Confessions* speaks of that:

[O]ne has an experience of beauty when, for one thing a seen object, a book one has read, or a piece of music touches the very bottommost sensory roots of one's body ... digs into the very bottom of one's instincts — and at the same time I suspect in it an otherworldly truth and good as though it were a hint, a message, towards the Ultimate Truth. A beautiful thing — forming a *bridge*, so to speak — points enigmatically from our most elementary sensation towards the "ultimate truth"... One is unfamiliar with the depths of one's instinctual life and is unable to give an answer to the ultimate questions, but one's perpetual nostalgia is continually present in the direction of the ultimate answer. It's as if a beautiful thing were a wink in the direction of the transcendental truth, towards infinity. The lower pillar of the bridge is our most profound biological being, its far pillar on the other bank is an illusion of a sense of being that has been hit upon.⁹⁸

The Sisyphean labor of our lives is characterized by the unceasing upward run — and Szentkuthy formulated that well before Camus. No one ever manages to reach the goal on the very first run: it is hunted down, gropingly, both instinctively and deliberately... The continual postponement of papal elections in *Bloody Ass* is like that, the presence of the idealist Joachim of Fiore,⁹⁹ according to whom the dawn of a new age would begin in 1260 with the arrival of the Age of the Holy Spirit — although we are in a position to know that it did not. The author picks from among the historical facts to be worked up, from the point that failure becomes obvious and mundane experiences, new beginnings, fantasizings, and sidetracks... This is it, then, the backdrops to the ultimate questions, the *coulisses* of

⁹⁸ FC, XXII, 589.

⁹⁹ Joachim of Fiore, also known as Joachim de Floris (c. 1135–1202), founded the monastic order of San Giovanni in Fiore. He was a mystic, a theologian, and an esotericist. His followers are called Joachimites.

our complexity, from which we are unable to extricate ourselves in this life; they are what give to our individuality, our identity, a tortuous frame.

Through committing the multiplicity to paper, through cataloguing it, Szentkuthy learned how to co-exist with it, overcome it, to contemplate it from a distance in the light of outside, objective values. The price for that way of life, however, is freedom and quiet, and those he was able to secure for himself. At daybreak, when he wrote the tens of thousands of pages of his diary, even on the very last morning of his life on July 18th, 1988, in preparation for his final path in search of the one and only metaphor.

As one cannot be in possession of all the facts, one has to believe Szentkuthy that the diary was his *chef-d'oeuvre*. Taking that into consideration, the question arises as to where *Prae* is to be placed, because that is where the literary life's work is disposed, that diary-like cultivar, like a big village in which every work is a house or street or tavern, and *Prae* is there, rising like a tower, a remnant hill, from among the houses. As I cannot give an answer to that question, all I can do is suspect that he wished in some '*prae*,' a 'precursor,' a 'before all else,' to lay down the abstractions which would be valid for him until the end of his days, that associative way of thinking, the laboratory work from which, from time to time, he would shoot forth a train of thought then dutifully return to the main line, only later on for another thought-rocket to break out from another retort... to adjust the continuation of his writing to the imperative impression of whatever was the given moment.¹⁰⁰ This way of writing became a symbol, a figure, a star for his entire life's work: in relation to the 'precursor' he made changes, switched genres, wrote short stories, splashed around in anachronisms, maybe let himself go in the direction of 'aimless thought,' as in the last sixty pages of *Narcissus' Mirror*, or he would devise metaphors, epithets, characterizations. And since the finishedness of *Prae* is questionable in the classic sense, I picture the aforesaid village, his structure is like a beehive, in such a way that its small buildings connect with the tower of *Prae* by underground passages, with diminutive beings carrying nutriments backwards and forwards, from here to there and back. That is how I interpret the intention of 'towards the one and only metaphor.' In that way the entire oeuvre became, in the metaphorical sense, a living being, the limbs of which are in continual dialogue with one another, due to their unfinishedness are incapable of surviving without each other, and we readers have to see the whole together — not linearly but analogically — as Szentkuthy himself tried to seize the polarized world surreptitiously, in the form of questions, in a uniform

¹⁰⁰ On this, see *Narcissusz tükre* [Narcissus' Mirror] 16.

whole, in one and only metaphor. If one succeeds in discerning the underground passages, then before us will unfold that Szentkuthy-style micro-unit, the minute details, the kaleidoscopes, which have been gone round for decades by literary scholars, poets, and critics from Antal Szerb, Gábor Halász, Béla Hamvas and László Németh to István Vas, György Somlyó, Imre Bori and Gyula Rugási, Péter Bálint, József J. Fekete, and Márton Molnár — and that is to leave a great many names out of the list of analysts of the Szentkuthy beehive.

In Monaco, an *autostrada* runs above the seashore, in reality a bridge on columns, in such a manner that the sea flows under the expressway and one can constantly hear the crashing of the waves. I am awfully fond of that sound. That is how everything rumbles inside me, every event, thought, figure, and emotional experience of my past — in a perpetual present.¹⁰¹

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¹⁰¹ FC, XX, 562.

MIKLÓS SZENTKUTHY



“Szentkuthy is a poet to the core: this is evidenced in the vibrating emotional tension of every sentence, the high sensitivity of the inner recorder, the novel, often daring, but always suggestive images, comparisons & associations in which his recitation moves. His attention turns to all manifestations of life with the same intensity [...] and offers the reader stimulation & immersion and deserves to be regarded as one of the values of the new Hungarian literature...” — Pester Lloyd