Balázs Kántás

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10 ESSAYS ON POETRY

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The Poem is Alive, just like the Author Themself

An Essay on the Evolution and Definition of "the Poem as Such"

So many people tried to define the criteria, function and essence of *the poem as such* that, in fact, it is perhaps superfluous to write down anything about this topic, and it is really difficult to state anything new. Certainly, it depends on whether one approaches the poem as a literary scholar, as a writer or only as a(n average) reader, trying to grasp and to define it. There are as many ways of (poem-)reading, (poem-)writing and definitions of the concept of the poem as many people there are in the world. Furthermore, there is as many times infinite, but at least innumerably many kinds of similar or even contradictory possible ways of reading, interpretation of a given poem as many poems there are in the world.

Certainly, the present short essay will not invent anything new. However, as for its intentions, it must make an attempt to conceive a subjective, but moderate opinion about what the poem can be, how it operates, what goals it should have, from the perspective of a professional reader of literary texts.

One thing for sure, the poem is a linguistic product. It is a kind of rhythmic text, a rhythmic piece of text that mediates something in a condensed manner, metaphors, medial contents of meanings. In the case if we speak about a poem that is *alive*, that is, it can operate, is valuable in the aesthetical sense of the word (we must stress the definition all of it is very subjective, and certainly, there are non-operating, that is, bad poems that are still poems, but they are not worth much – furthermore, perhaps the majority of poems being born belong to this category!), then the poem is a text that speaks in a more condensed way than the

genre of prose, in a much shorter extent, and it does all of this in such a way that the all-time reader is impressed by it. In a better case, a poem is not didactic. In contrast to the genre of prose, the genre of poetry should be characterised by the fact that it conceives its messages in as many words as unconditionally necessary, and it makes the all-time reader think about and interpret it in some manner. In general, we speak about texts of shorter extent, but certainly we do not have to define the concept of the poem based on its extent. The poem is a very high-level, complex and encoded form of communication – in general, especially sensitive persons who are able to see behind the words read and interpret poems; therefore, we might resign from making the statement that poems that are able to communicate on a higher level are understandable to everyone. Certainly, there are different layers of interpretation, and there are occasional poems that are sometimes written for propagandistic goals, but perhaps everyone can agree with the fact that the aesthetic level of such poetic texts can be very doubtful, although it is true that this kind of poetry can also be practiced on a very high level.

So what may define the concept of the poem? The topic, the form, the content? Probably none of them, since it is possible to compose very superb poems about any topic, in any form and with any content – we may speak much more about the original, individual, creative use of language. Certainly, there is no common, wide-spread, completely valid and exact way of composing poetry, not even if it is widely known that many technical aspects of poem-writing can be learnt. There are also poems that build themselves up of well-known commonplaces, but they are not worth being spoken about. Good poems – certainly, on different levels – speak in a way as no text before them has ever spoken, they conceive some message via new poetic images, figures and phrases that has never been conceived before by any other text in such a form. Certainly, we have still stated very little – in practice, the success(fullness) of poems depends on individual cases and individual reactions of the

readers. That is, there is no exact and acknowledged way of composing a good poem that speaks in an original voice. A poet is either able to do so or not, however, so much seems to be justified from the practice that it does not matter *about what* we write, but it matters *how* we do that, and how much the individual way of language use created within the frameworks of the given poem is able to approach someone else about whom we suppose that they is able to receive works of art at a fairly high level.

But how does the poem evolve if we have at least some draft-like conception about what it is at all? Probably there can be several answers to this question, and the most traditional and most common statement sounds something like this: the poet, the person who is capable of the unique and creative use of language departs from the phenomena of the outside world perceived by them, from their own experiences, they finally takes a pen, or rather in the contemporary more and more "technicalised" world, a notebook and produces a text that contains fairly condensed, enclosed, indirect elements of meaning, for the purpose of recording their own thoughts / feeling and conceiving them toward others. In an optimal case, the text produced like this has an aesthetic function – that is, it delights the reader, and it also has a *didactical* function, that is, it "teaches" the reader – certainly, not in the negative, strained sense of the word, as we established in above –, and even if it does not teaches the reader some kind of new knowledge, but at least it makes an attempt to open up some higher contents the learning of which, that is, thinking over the text makes the reader – intellectually and emotionally – more than before. Certainly, the aesthetical and didactical functions are not unconditionally present in the poem to the same proportion. It may occur that a poem is rather beautiful, that is, it rather delights the reader, but it is much more difficult to define *what message it conceives*, and in other cases, it can also occur that a poem mediates some fairly explicit message to us, and the real weight of the text rather stands in the strong way of conceiving a message, and at the same time we

think the text to be much less *beautiful*, aesthetic than being a strong statement. When we state that a poem *teaches* us, we still do not have to think about poetry that carries only some current, occasional meaning, perhaps of political content, although the poetry of representation, the poetry of public life can also represent a very high level of literature, and it can also mediate universal truths to the reader beyond the contents of (current) politics. We speak about the fact *the poem as such* makes an attempt to tell us something about which we have already known, and it only reinforces our knowledge, some of our convictions about the world, or it even highlights some fact that has probably been there in front of our eyes, but we needed an accidentally found text, a *message in the bottle* – as the great modern Russian poet, Osip Mandelstam conceived, and from whom Paul Celan also borrowed the metaphor – to realise it. It can be either some kind of political content, some universal truth of life, some state of emotions or even some traumatic experience, and we could continue it up to infinity. The essence is evidently in the fact that the poet, the subject who creates the poem takes their material from the outside world and from their own emotions and experiences, and when they starts speaking / writing, perhaps they may rightfully suppose that the all-time reader has very similar experiences and knowledge of the world to their own. Perhaps one of the criteria of the good poem is that it mediates such a content or emotion, informs us about such a situation or experience in its form of existence filled with metaphorical layers of meaning with which the readers can identify themselves in some manner. For this reason, it may be established that under no circumstances does the poem come into existence from nothingness, via the subject of language, but it is really an artistic product that comes into being from the feelings, experiences and mind of a human being, that is, it is the (result of the creative) work of an author, of a person, and although it can be separated from the author as an autonomous work of art made of language to some degree, but at the same time, to some degree, it is also

inseparable from its author. The poem is not else but the linguistic trace of the life, emotions and world-view of the author that undoubtedly belong to *the author*, but meanwhile it may belong, it belongs to *everyone else* who reads, receives, thinks over and interprets it.

Naturally, all of this does not mean at all that we should return to the interpretation of poems based on mere biographical facts in a very old-fashioned manner, simplifying the possible interpretations of poetic texts. The reception, that is, the understanding and interpretation of the text take place first and foremost from the direction of the living text itself; however, perhaps only a few people would challenge the statement according to which it is useful to know the biography, the possible experiences and motivations of the author, the historical context in which the text was born if we would like to interpret a certain literary text. That is, the author is not completely *dead* as it is stated by the commonplace of literary studies that has already become empty by today – the author is very *alive*, namely, he lives within the text, in the same way as, at least in an optimal case, the text itself also lives an autonomous life and is able to speak as a living subject, calling to the sensitive reader.

Certainly, within the frameworks of the present short essay, we have not invented or discovered any important novelty. We have not done anything else but writing down some statements about the essence, the function and the way of evolution of the poem, which someone can agree, or they can even think the very contrary. Perhaps we are also fortunate, because *the poem as such* is a kind of text about which it is very difficult to make exact statements. Therefore, it can always seem a current problem to people dealing with literature to make an attempt to define, grasp or understand the essence of poem. Even if it is not possible to describe the poem with the methods of natural sciences, with objective formulas of truth, but perhaps, together with all of the statements made about it, we can get closer to the understanding of what type(s) of text(s) we must face. In the

same way, when we encounter good, aesthetically valuable poems and we are able to hear out the message of them, we get closer to what we have been really searching for: the essence of the poem as a text, as a work of art made of language…

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The Motif of Damnation in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven"

Introduction

The aim of the present essay is first and foremost to examine and explore the motif of damnation in the well-known poem called "The Raven" by the early 19th-century American poet Edgar Allan Poe, within the frameworks of an in-depth analysis. The starting point is that the poem can be interpreted as a poem of damnation; that is, damnation is one of the dominant motifs within the poem. I intend to define damnation as a state or situation from which there is seemingly no escape, as a hopeless and possibly final state of mind and soul that may even manifest itself at physical, not only at a psychical level. In the present context, this state of damnation mainly derives from loss. Furthermore, this state defined as damnation can also have different degrees and may be experienced at several different levels. As a first step, I would like to briefly explore the circumstances of the composition and make an attempt to establish connections between the possible biographical circumstances of the author and the writing process of the poem, presenting possible biographical motivations that the author might have had in composing one of the most prominent pieces of his poetic work.

After the short examination of the circumstances of the composition and the possible biographical motivations, I intend to examine the poem and its narrative structure stanza by stanza, and find motifs and references among the lines that may support that damnation is one of the key motifs of the work. In addition, I would like to provide several levels of possible interpretations and reveal what different kinds of damnation may be present in the poem; in other words, to analyse how many ways the narrator

telling the narrative poem might be considered to be damned. After revealing several modes and grades of damnation supposedly implied in the poem, I intend to make an attempt to provide an interpretation that may bring closer the different aspects of damnation in the poem to each other, based on the text itself and on a few biographical data and / or accepted critical approaches.

Finally, after the in-depth analysis and the exploration of the motifs that imply damnation in the poem, I will make an attempt to reach some conclusion, making some concluding remarks on the analysis of the poem.

Possible Biographical Motivations and Circumstances of the Composition

Before attempting an in-depth analysis of the poem based on the text itself, it might be worth having a few glances at the possible biographical motivations of the author and the circumstances of the composition. The starting point is that the poet's biographical events, at least partly, may have influenced the creation of the poem, and the poetic narrator can be considered partly identical with the author himself. Although it may be considered evident to a certain degree, yet these aspects might have some relevance from the point of view of interpretation.

Poe supposedly wrote "The Raven" in 1844. It was first published on January 29, 1845, in *The New York Evening Mirror.* It became his probably most prominent poetic work already in his life, and it was reprinted and published many times after the date of the first publication. Partly due to "The Raven", Poe became a highly popular author within the contemporary American literary circles. "The Raven" appeared in numerous anthologies, for example, in the anthology entitled *Poets and Poetry in America,* 1847, edited by Rufus Wilmot Griswold.

As it can be read in *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe,* the poem is now analyzed in middle schools, high schools and universities, almost creating a literary myth around

itself. (Kopley 193). It was named "the poem about remembering" by Poe's contemporary William Gilmore Simms, but it is interesting to examine what role "remembering" could play in the composition of the poem, not strictly separating Poe himself from the poetic narrator of his work.

First of all, in his essay entitled "The Philosophy of Composition," in which he, in fact, analyses his own poem "The Raven" and discusses the circumstances of the writing and justifies his selection of the topic, Poe openly denies that the poem was mainly inspired by biographical facts and his own memories.

However, considering only the number of the people whom Edgar Allan Poe lost in his life (although I do not get immersed in the biographical events of the author in detail, due the limited extension of the essay, the people whom he lost and the personal tragedies of his life are well-known for biographers and literary historians) before writing his poem called "The Raven", it may seem evident that these losses could lead the poet to a very depressed and seemingly hopeless state of soul, which could play a serious role in writing a poem about loss and the hopelessness felt for it. The dark atmosphere of the poem is mainly created by the poetic narrator's loss of his beloved called Lenore, as it is well-known, and this loss of the beloved woman may lead to a mental and psychical state similar to or identical with damnation, damnation that can be defined as a situation that is seemingly final and from which there is no escape.

In "The Philosophy of Composition", published in the April issue of *Graham's Magazine*, 1846, as mentioned above, Poe makes an attempt to present the analysis of his own poem "The Raven" and also to describe the circumstances of the composition. The author claims that he considered each aspect of the poem and that he had a completely conscious conception about what to write.

Although in the present essay I do not intend to analyse "The Philosophy of Composition" in detail, I attempt to use it in order

to spotlight the supposed circumstances of the composition of the poem and the poetic intention depicted in it. As it can be read in the tenth paragraph of the essay, Poe himself strongly argues that the poem was the result of conscious poetic work and he had an exact concept about what and how to write:

"The initial consideration was that of extent. If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression — for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and every thing like totality is at once destroyed. But since, ceteris paribus, no poet can afford to dispense with any thing that may advance his design, it but remains to be seen whether there is, in extent, any advantage to counterbalance the loss of unity which attends it. Here I say no, at once." (Poe)

That is, as a matter of fact, Poe himself concentrates on his poetic purposes and his intended literary achievement in a seemingly impersonal voice. In the essay, his style is rather analytic than emotional, he seems to consider himself a craftsman.

Nevertheless, several literary historians and critics doubt that Poe himself thought it completely serious what he wrote down in "The Philosophy of Composition", and it is widely considered to be a pedantic writing towards the public audience rather than an honest confession about the composition of the poem. For instance, T. S. Eliot himself also dealt with the possible circumstances of the composition and argued that "The Raven" rather seems to be the result of personal motivations than the result of a conscious poetic concept. As he states it:

"It is difficult for us to read that essay without reflecting that if Poe plotted out his poem with such calculation, he might have

taken a little more pains over it: the result hardly does credit to the method." (Eliot, cited in Hoffman 76)

In addition, also one of the famous biographers of Poe Joseph Wood Krutch describes the essay as, "a rather highly ingenious exercise in the art of rationalization than literary criticism." (98) That is, it cannot be neglected that several literary scholars tend to treat the essay as a kind of posterior attempt to rationalize the writing of a poem that was supposedly induced, at least partly, by the author's real emotions and remembrances. Furthermore, as written in the literary-historical work entitled *A History of American Literature – from Puritanism to Postmodernism*, it does not seem to be very probable that Poe really wrote "The Raven" so thoughtfully and methodically as he claims in his own essay – the authors rather tend to suppose that the narrator of the essay is one of Poe's "maniac" narrators that can be observed in several of his short stories; for instance, in "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Black Cat", "The Mask of the Red Death", etc. (Ruland and Brandbury 651)

The present essay also tends to accept the assumption that biographical motivations played a serious role in the composition of one of Poe's most significant poems, and he did not write it completely so consciously and analytically, since it strongly seems to be an honest confession about a state of soul in which he possibly really was in the period when he wrote the poem. Biographical events in themselves may seem unimportant from the point of view of analyzing the text itself; however, this aspect will be highlighted again in a further chapter of the present essay, since the supposable poetic self-confessional character of the poem might pave the way for examining "The Raven" as a meta-poetic work that is also meant to express the necessary damnation of poets.

After the attempt to briefly outline the possible biographical motivations of the author, henceforth I intend to explore several

levels of damnation in the poem, within the framework of an in-depth analysis.

Damnation as a General Aspect within "The Raven"

As mentioned above several times, the main aim of the present essay is to interpret the poem called "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe as a poem about damnation. I intend to define the concept of damnation as a state of suffering from which there is no escape, or a situation for which there is no solution at all, either in the physical or in the mental and psychical sense of the word. Several leitmotifs of the poem, such as midnight, winter, solitude, mourn, loss, etc. refer to the fact that the fictitious world created within the literary work and the poetic narrator enclosed in this world are surrounded by, and actually exist in the state of damnation. In the present section I intend to explore some of the motifs that might be interpreted as references to the state of damnation of the poetic speaker, mainly based on the text of the poem itself, illustrating with textual examples, then in the following section I make an attempt to find several different possible levels of damnation within the poem.

It may sound like a commonplace that the poem itself begins with a very dark and ominous overture, as it can be read immediately in the first stanza, and this ominous atmosphere is created by words and phrases such as "midnight dreary", "weary", "forgotten lore", "rapping", "muttered". That is, the first stanza is full of words that contribute to the dark atmosphere, and this dark atmosphere is immediately created in the beginning of the poem:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
`'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, `tapping at my chamber door –
Only this, and nothing more.' (1–6)

As it is interpreted in the same way by several critics and literary historians who have ever dealt with Poe's "The Raven" (e. g., Artúr Elek, Charles Kopley or Jay B. Hubbel), the narrator of the poem is supposedly a young scholar who has recently lost his beloved, and in order to forget a little about his grief, he tries to be immersed in (possibly scientific) books. It is midnight and December. The whole starting situation seems to be depressed, hopeless and gloomy. As written in the first stanza, the speaker nearly falls asleep. It may even be interpreted that he is near to death; in other words, this half-sleeping state is a transitory condition between life and death, although physically he is still alive.

Until the Raven itself appears, the situation within the narrator's room is nearly static and unchanged. He only hears knocking on the chamber door and remembers his lost beloved several times, but the atmosphere is not broken. As a matter of fact, in the first six stanzas, the first third of the poem there is not much more than a static poetic meditation and a prelude to the real events of the narration. Closely examining the first six stanzas and their atmosphere, it may be discovered that the speaker tries to escape from his mourning for Lenore and hopes for a guest who will save him from his hopeless solitude behind the knocking on the chamber door, but he is disappointed every time when he attempts to check who is outside, and everything, every single noise makes him remember only his lost Lenore.

As the poetic narrative goes forward, the Raven suddenly appears in the room of the narrator, from outside, and the only one word, the later recurring refrain of the poem is pronounced by it for the first time. All of this is depicted in the seventh stanza that can be interpreted as a turning point within the narration:

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore.
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door –

Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door –
Perched, and sat, and nothing more. (43–48)

The static and hopeless nature of the situation is seemingly broken up by the appearance of the bird that lands on Pallas's bust. Then, at least for a while, the Raven remains silent, and the poetic narrator seems to feel better, due to the presence of the unexpected and bizarre night visitor.

The key phrase of the poem, the recurring refrain closing down every single stanza from here is pronounced at the end of the eighth stanza:

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
`Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,' I said,
`art sure no craven.
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore –
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!'
Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.' (50–56)

The Raven answers to the question about what his name is; that is, he may name himself and does not only repeat the phrase mechanically as the poetic speaker assumes it in the beginning. Even in the beginning, it may have a much deeper relevance within the poem than the persona himself or readers would think it for the first sight.

Whatever the poetic voice asks of the Raven, the answer is always the same: *nevermore*. Certainly, when he starts supposing that the Raven is, in fact, a herald from the afterlife – all the same whether from heaven or hell – and he asks about his lost beloved Lenore, the answer is the same:

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an
unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.

`Wretch,' I cried, `thy God hath lent thee - by these angels he has
sent thee
Respite – respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost Lenore!'
Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.' (79–84)

As it can be read in stanza 14, it suddenly runs through the speaker's mind that the bird sitting on the bust of Pallas may not be an ordinary bird, but some supernatural creature that was sent to him to bring news from over there. In the moment when the speaker realises that it is not an ordinary, earthly creature present in his room, at first it is hope that flashes up for a little while within the whole dark and seemingly impenetrably hopeless atmosphere of the poem and within the state of soul of the speaker.

However, when the Raven's answer is *nevermore* to the speaker's question whether or not he will see Lenore one more time, even if not in this earthly, mortal human life, but in his afterlife, his hopefulness and momentary good mood suddenly turns into fury and deeper despair than before. Nevertheless, once again he repeats the question in stanza 16, trying to control his fury:

Prophet!' said I, `thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us – by that God we both adore –
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels named Lenore –
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels named
Lenore?'
Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.' (90–96)

Despite the fact that the Raven answers *nevermore* to any question, the narrator's hopefulness flashes up one more time, and he supposes that perhaps in another life, in a dimension beyond his present human and consequently helpless existence he

will perhaps meet his lost beloved. He may know exactly what the next answer of the bird will be, yet he asks the question once again, deceiving himself in a certain way. Stanza 17 might be interpreted as another important turning point within the poetic narration, as a point of no return, where all of the hope flashing up before gets lost in the darkness, and nothing remains within the room and within the soul of the speaker but bitterness, hopelessness, and despair; that is, he finds himself in a form of damnation.

The last stanza in which the poetic narrator states that "…[his] soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor shall be lifted – nevermore!" may be interpreted as the vortex of damnation where the dimension of time that has been present and observable in the former stanzas seems to cease, and some endless, eternal damnation surrounds the speaker, both his physical body and his soul. The room becomes a place where the shadow of the Raven rules; furthermore, it is strengthened by the fact that the speaker condemns himself to damnation, since it is him who pronounces the last *nevermore* within the poem.

Having made an attempt to briefly explore the presence of some general aspect of damnation within the stanzas of the narrative poem, henceforth I will turn to the different possible levels of damnation that are behind the general impression made by the atmosphere and imagery of Poe's poetic work.

A Possible Approach – The Raven Itself as the Carrier of Damnation

The Raven, the key motif, and effectively the protagonist of the poem may be interpreted as an entity that carries damnation, and brings this damnation into the internal world of the speaker and upon the poetic speaker himself from outside. In this case, it should certainly be presupposed that the poetic narrator is not originally damned, and the internal literary world of the poem is not in the state of damnation from the very beginning.

The present section of the essay attempts to provide one possible interpretation about one certain level of damnation within the poem – damnation that is brought upon the poetic narrator by the Raven itself. In other words, in the present analysis it is supposed that the narrator is not in the state of damnation at the beginning of the narration, but he gradually reaches the state of damnation after the Raven appears in his room and lands on the bust of Pallas Athena, goddess of wisdom in Greek mythology. One possible interpretation of the poem, from the point of view of damnation is that it is not enough that Lenore, the beloved woman has died and the poetic narrator simply mourns her, it is not the only reason in itself for which he is slowly surrounded by the dark and impenetrable atmosphere of damnation.

Literary critic Granger B. Howell also argues that the atmosphere of the poem in itself foreshadows a state that is similar to damnation, or it can even be treated as identical with damnation, damnation in the Christian sense of the word. As Howell writes in his essay entitled "Devil Lore in 'The Raven' ":

It's not simply that she is dead. It is that he has damned himself. It is no mistake that the month is "bleak December" rather than an equally dreary November. The forces of darkness are never more powerful than during the high holy days of the Christian year, and December, with its share of the twelve days of Christmas, ranks foremost. The mention of "each separate dying ember [which] wrought its ghost upon the floor," is reminiscent of Coleridge's "Christabel" in which other embers reflect the presence of evil in much the same way.

Howell suggests that December and midnight, the time of the narration itself creates an atmosphere that is favourable for the "powers of darkness" in the Christian sense; that is, the environment depicted in the poem surrounding the narrator is a completely suitable place for damnation.

Attempting to find the appropriate passage about Edgar Allan Poe within the book entitled *Az amerikai irodalom története* (*History of American Literature*, one of the most known comprehensive works about American Literature published in Hungarian), it is observable that the authors make nearly the same suggestion as Howell's: the presence of the Raven gradually brings ultimate despair and darkness into the room and into the mind of the poetic narrator, and the refrain *nevermore* repeated time and again slowly but securely strengthens the sense of damnation, the sense of a state from which seemingly there is no way of escape. It is also argued that the final /r/ phoneme of the refrain (pronounced in the rhotic American accent after the long /o/, while usually unpronounced in Standard Southern British English) also carries some darkness and ominous character within itself, the symbolism of sounds, mainly that of the dark vowels apart from final /r/-s that predominates the poem also contributes to the dark, gothic and apparently hopeless atmosphere that surrounds the whole narration (Országh and Virágos 65–66).

One key argument for the statement that the narrator is not, at least not completely in the state of damnation until the Raven appears in his room may be the fact that in the first six stanzas, as mentioned above, in the first and apparently static phase of the poetic narration, the narrator is sad and mourns for his lost beloved, but no supernatural force is explicitly present within the room. He can be treated as only an average man, with average pains and sadness. In the present essay it may be accepted that although the atmosphere is ominous and sad from the beginning of the poem, in the first six stanzas only premonitory signs (e. g., the ominous knocking on the door, the howling wind outside, the whole mood generated by "the bleak December", etc.) of damnation are present. As analysed above, the seventh stanza of the poem in which the Raven suddenly flies into the room from outside, is the turning point of the poetic narration where the static state and motionlessness is broken up.

The sudden appearance of the Raven undoubtedly generates tension both in the mind of the poetic speaker and in the course of the narration. The speaker's monotonous mournfulness suddenly turns into curiosity and pale hopefulness. He is curious about the origin of the bird, and when he suddenly realises that the Raven is not an ordinary animal, but it may be in possession some supernatural forces, he wants to believe that there is maybe hope for him to meet his lost beloved one more time, if not in this world, then in some kind of afterlife. But when the Raven's answer is *nevermore* to any question asked of him, the hope that flashed up in the poetic speaker's heart and mind suddenly starts fading away. As it is written in the last stanza of the poem cited above, he realises that the bird has not brought news to him about his lost beloved, even if it is sent and governed by supernatural forces. On the contrary, the Raven was sent as an executor, in order to destroy even the last splinters of hope in the narrator's heart and mind, always and timelessly making him remember that there is no way out of the state of damnation. The narrator must realise that he will never see his lost beloved Lenore again either in his mortal human existence or in his afterlife. It is also suggested that he will not even reach any kind of afterlife, rather he will stay in his room for ever, in eternal grief and despair, in a transitory state between life and death; in fact, in the state of damnation that falls on him in the form of the Raven's dark wings.

At this level, damnation can be interpreted as a process, or at least the result of a process rather than a static and unchanged state. The persona goes through a process and gradually reaches damnation, due to the appearance and presence of the Raven, and the hopelessness and darkness generated by it. The soul of the speaker may not be lost from the very beginning of the poem, but it gets lost in the dark gyres of loss, hopelessness and unavoidable remembrances. The Raven is supposedly a supernatural entity who comes from outside – from outside, where there is only darkness, night and winter – and breaks in the

poetic speaker's room; that is, the Raven penetrates into his internal world, into his ultimate lair where he might have escaped from his own loss, remembrance and dark thoughts resulting from them. But there is no escape – the Raven as the carrier of damnation, coming from outside, finds the narrator even here, in this enclosed environment, and makes him realise that he cannot hide from the pain of loss and cannot deceive himself into hoping that once he will find his lost beloved again, if not here, then in some dreamland, Eden, anywhere else beyond his present human existence. The Raven, as the speaker himself suggests in the last stanza, will stay with him for ever to make him remember his losses and his hopeless situation. His room, where he escaped from the outside world, from damnation, becomes itself the place and prison of damnation.

Examining one of the possible aspects of damnation within the poem, the Raven as the carrier of damnation, in the following section of the essay I will make an attempt to explore another possible level of damnation present within the poem.

Damnation as an Original and Unchanged State in the Poem

As outlined in the previous chapter, although the aspect of damnation can be interpreted as a process, not situation or a state originally given, it may also be examined as an original and unchanged state. Having explored arguments for accepting the suggestion that the poetic narrator of "The Raven" might not be in the state of damnation from the very beginning of the poem, in the present section of the essay I would like to examine another possible level of damnation in the poem from a different perspective, proceeding from the assumption that the speaker is perhaps in the state of damnation from the beginning. Now I make an attempt to examine the poem supposing that the Raven is not the carrier of damnation, but it is only something that makes the poetic narrator realise the truth.

As discussed above, the atmosphere of the "The Raven" is clearly ominous and dark even in the first stanzas when the

Raven is not yet present. This atmosphere of melancholy and darkness is created immediately in the very beginning of the poem, and it is sustained all along. The narrator is sitting in his room, mourning for his lost beloved Lenore and meditates about whether or not he will see her once again in some form, when the mysterious knocking from outside suddenly disturbs his meditative state of mind, and he wants to explore who is knocking on his door at any price. In the second stanza it is also mentioned by the narrator that he "eagerly (…) wished the morrow"; in other words, he is waiting for the end of the ominous and dark night that strongly contributes to his sad and hopeless state of soul, apart from the pain of loss that he feels.

When the Raven appears, as discussed above, the poetic speaker wants to believe that the bird may give him some hope and can lead him out of his originally hopeless and dark situation. He may even see some saviour in the bird that has arrived to somehow redeem him from damnation. But when the Raven repeats only *nevermore*, it becomes clear for the speaker that he *is* in a situation from which he can escape no more, and he does not reach damnation gradually, since there is nothing to reach, only damnation exists as an unchanged state from which it is impossible to break out.

John F. Adams also suggests that the Raven is in fact a kind of "private symbol", as he calls it; that is, not a physical entity, but rather the projection of the grief of the poetic persona, an abstract entity that stands for the feelings and the state of soul of the narrator. (In his essay the author also compares the traditional folkloric and mythological properties and associations as for ravens and the properties and associations that are observable in and generated by E. A. Poe's poem and its title character. The author draws the conclusion that Poe uses the motif of the raven in a very individual way and creates a so-called "private symbol" of it, rather than using it as an allusion to various folkloric and mythological sources in which otherwise controversial

connotations are attributed to ravens.) As Adams writes it in his essay entitled "Classical Raven Lore and Poe's Raven":

In the course of the poem, the Raven develops and modifies this and its other associations, becoming more and more a private symbol, more and more a dream or hallucinatory figure generated by the persona's emotional bankruptcy, increasingly symbolizing private spiritual dryness rather than personal lamentation for a specific loss.

Adams's argumentation seems to be supportable if I consider the basic atmosphere of the poem and the original state of soul of the poetic narrator that are, in fact, not drastically changed by the appearance of the Raven and the continuous repetition of the phrase *nevermore*. Certainly, the Raven can be interpreted as something that is not completely part of reality, a supposedly supernatural creature that appears in the environment of the poetic narrator in a physical form, but also a kind of mental entity that appears within the mind of the speaker. It is hard to decide whether its presence in the room is physical or symbolic, but the present approach seems to support that it is rather a visionary figure existing within the narrator's mind than a concrete physical entity.

If the Raven is treated as a "private symbol", it is not necessary to interpret it as a mystic herald or a carrier of damnation, not even as an independent and physically existing character of the narrative poem. It can also be only the projection of the speaker's dark thoughts and unbearable sense of loss. When he talks to the Raven and hears the same answer every time – *nevermore*, the dialogue may not be between him and another living character, but he may only talk to himself, gradually comprehending the fact that his beloved really died and nothing or no-one can resurrect her. Furthermore, considering the fact that the poetic speaker is supposedly a young scholar, a man knowledgeable about (possibly also natural) sciences; that is,

supposedly a rational and intellectual person, the Raven may also be interpreted as nothing more than the awakening of his own rational sense of reality that suggests him that no-one may resurrect from death, however he loved Lenore, he inevitably has to resign himself to the fact that she is dead. However, he cannot work up the fact that the beloved woman exists "nevermore" in any form, and even love cannot overwhelm human mortality. In vain does the speaker's mind know that Lenore is dead, his soul is incapable of accepting the cold, rational and, as a matter of fact, paradoxically natural truth. This realisation, this complete and ultimate loss of the last splinters of hope might lead the speaker to a mental state from which there is no way out; that is, into a state of mind and soul that can be treated as equal to damnation. It is not suggested at all that the speaker physically dies, but it is rather suggested that he has to resign himself to the fact that his beloved is dead, and no-one on earth can escape from death. Perhaps he will live for much more time, beyond the scope of the poetic narration and the frameworks of the poem, but since he has lost all of his hope by facing the death of someone whom he loved, the rest of his life will probably be unhappy and desperate. He will have to live in a kind of earthly damnation until his death, without any supernatural force that leads him to damnation, because surprisingly it is him who condemns himself to damnation by his own sadness and ultimate loss of hope.

After revealing two possible levels of damnation in the poem, in the next section of the essay I attempt to explore another, and maybe interesting possible level of damnation.

Meta-poetry in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" – the Necessary Damnation of Poets

In the present section of the essay, I make an attempt to provide one more and perhaps a little unusual interpretation of the poem, from the point of view of damnation. Several literary historians and critics who have ever written about E. A. Poe in some form agree that he was undoubtedly one of the most prominent and

original figures in the history of American Literature, or at least during the 19th century. It is often argued that his poetic magnitude and poetic sense of the world that manifests itself in nearly all of his writings cannot be neglected within the analysis of his obviously most known poem of high aesthetic value.

As Hungarian literary critic Artúr Elek wrote in 1910, it is never to be neglected that Poe was *a poet* in every single piece of his works; therefore, his obsessive engagement to aestheticism and beauty cannot be ignored, no matter which piece of his literary lifework is being analysed. (67) (Although Elek's critical approach may seem old-fashioned today, comparing them to contemporary trends of literary criticism, it may be worth examining the same text from even highly different perspectives of different eras of literary history in order to explore as much possibilities of interpretation as possible.)

If the assumption is accepted that Poe was a *poet* in each of his works, and his being a poet is inseparable from the atmosphere and possible interpretations of any of his poems (or even his prose works), then it is possible to examine and interpret "The Raven" and see the presence of damnation within it with a completely different eye.

As mentioned above several times, the poetic narrator is often interpreted as a young scholar; in any case, an intellectual who mourns her lost love Lenore. But would it not be possible to interpret the figure of the narrator as a poet, a man of letters who attempts to be immersed in literature in order to forget about his memories and pain for a while? If it is supposed that the poetic narrator is, at least partly, identical with Poe himself, and as discussed above, biographical motivations may also have inspired the composition of the poem, (although Poe himself argues in "The Philosophy of Composition" that he had nearly no autobiographical inspiration and his only aim with the poem was to write a beautiful piece of poetry of deep content), it becomes more and more acceptable that "The Raven" can also be interpreted as a meta-poetic work, a certain kind of poetic self-

confession, a confession about a poet's sufferings resulting in the composition of an aesthetically valuable poem.

The opening situation of the poem is unchanged, even if it is accepted that the poetic narrator is rather a poet than a natural scientist. But it may also be audaciously supposed that he is writing a poem about the loss of his beloved Lenore when he suddenly hears something from outside that disturbs his melancholic and meditative state of mind. Going further, it also appears to be imaginable that the poetic narrator is writing his poem called "The Raven", a poem in which the bird is a symbol of his personal pain and the loss of his beloved. Then suddenly the poem comes to life and becomes reality, at least for the poet himself, within his own room, and finally the Raven, the embodiment of his grief and unforgettable memories comes to life and appears in front of him – it can even be claimed it is the text itself that comes to life via its own poetic power. If I consider this possibility of interpretation, then the statement that a (poetic) text comes to life and becomes independent of its creator at one level, but at another level it may become one with its creator, is not so far from the widely accepted postmodernist trends of literary criticism according to which the text lives its own life, introduced and accepted by the Deconstructionists and others. The persona / poet may face his own poetic visions, and through the presence of the Raven, which, in fact, may exist only in the poet's fantasies and in the physical reality at the same time, he becomes one with his poetry. It might be a possible approach that a perfect poem can be born only at the price of the deepest emotional shock that a human being can go through: the loss of someone, the loss of a beloved beautiful woman. A poet has to experience emotional and physical extremities of the highest degree in order to become capable of creating a perfect piece of literature, perfect in every sense, in order to be able to write a valuable poem similar to "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. In other words, it is necessary for the poet to experience and survive an extreme situation, a nearly unbearable state of soul and mind,

a state close to damnation in order to gain the capability of achieving aesthetic perfection. In this sense, damnation can also be treated as a psychological state, bringing the concepts of madness and damnation very close to each other. Considering the fact that the key motif of several of Poe's short stories is madness, it may not sound so weird if madness and damnation are treated as similar to each other, or even accept the hypothesis that madness can be treated as a certain type of damnation.

In "The Raven", the poetic narrator lost his beloved, and this loss is very hard to get through. This loss is what leads to a mental and emotional state that is close or identical with damnation. The narrator has to face solitude, hopelessness and probably everlasting grief. His room is a place for sufferings, and facing the creature of his own poetic imagination, the Raven that is meant to express all of his sorrow, pain and dark emotions, he undoubtedly experiences damnation within his own poetic mind. He hears the cruel refrain *nevermore* pronounced again and again, pushing him deeper and deeper into his own grief and pain, but from inside, not from outside. The room, as an enclosed environment, may also mean much more than only the poet's room in the simple physical sense. This room can also stand for his mind and soul within which the interaction between him and the Raven – that is identical with his own sorrow and remembrances which he is seemingly unable to get rid of – occurs. As a result of this interaction, the poetic narrator reaches a state of soul that is very similar to damnation and from which seemingly, as stressed above several times, there is no way out. However, experiencing a state similar to damnation, in parallel with unbearable emotional pain and the darkest sorrow that a man can live through, he also gains the capability to write perfect poems, to see human existence from a higher perspective and produce pieces of literature that are everlasting and have some superior message to the all-time reader; pieces of literature that can cause aesthetical pleasure and make people think about their own existence at the same time.

In the last stanza, the poetic narrator condemns himself to damnation explicitly, and although the rest of his life after the loss of his beloved may be sad and nearly completely hopeless, having gone through a serious trauma and experienced damnation, now he possesses the capability of creating everlasting pieces of poetry, and for a poet it is maybe much more important than living a normal and happy life in the everyday sense. At least partly considering his biographical data and possible motivations discussed in the beginning of the present essay, even if this it seems to contradict postmodernist critical approaches according to which the biography of the author does not matter in the interpretation of a text, the author himself may have been completely aware of the fact that it is nearly necessary for a poet to experience extremities of life and states close to damnation in order to be capable of writing something that is more valuable and beautiful than any average piece of literature in the world, since the honest suffering of an artist may add something more to the value of the given work of art. In this sense, the meta-poetic character of "The Raven" and the concept of necessary poetic damnation can be connected with the 19th century French literary tradition called the *poète maudit* (accursed poet), also considering the fact that Poe was nearly the contemporary of Charles Baudelaire, one of the French poets traditionally named *Les Poètes Maudites* and had a serious influence on several French symbolist poets. French Literary historian Pascal Brisette even states that Poe himself was one of the authors called by this name, despite the fact that he was American, just like John Keats, whose life and poetry also show features referring to damnation and cursedness (Brisette 36).

This way, the meta-poetic interpretation of "The Raven" and the introduction of the concept of *necessary poetic damnation* within the poem, for the sake of creating everlasting poetry, may seem to be a supportable approach that brings closer older traditional and postmodernist readings to each other, among the several other possible approaches and interpretations of this well-

known poem written by one of the prominent canonised American poets of the 19th century.

Concluding Remarks

Literary historian Charles Feidelson Jr. claims that E. A. Poe was a poet who apparently seriously believed in the "physical power of words" (37). Making an attempt to examine probably one of his most prominent poetic works entitled "The Raven", this statement may be seen justified. The complexity, the multi-layered character of the poem obviously proves to both literary critics and readers that the author might have been one of the prominent and most original poets within the history of American Literature.

In the present essay, I examined and explored the aspects of damnation within the poem. Examining only a few possible levels of interpretation from the point of view of damnation, it became clear that several possible ways of interpretation may prove to be acceptable, several ways that can even be seen as controversial approaches, yet somehow they complete each other, and together they constitute a whole. Damnation can be a process initiated by or a state carried by the Raven. Simultaneously, it can be seen as a state that is unchanged from the beginning, and the bird only makes the narrator realise that he has been in the state of damnation for long. Furthermore, beyond the loss of the beloved women, being a poet identical with being in the state of a kind of damnation also arises as a possible manner of interpreting "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. Different types of damnations are revolving within the same kaleidoscope, different levels of interpretation appear to be valid for the same poem, and these different approaches may present a complete picture about the poem as a whole. Damnation, state or process, poetic or just simply mental and emotional, is the very state within which the narrator of Poe's "The Raven" suffers, and the Raven itself is the physical embodiment, the incarnation of this damnation within the poem. By reading "The Raven", Edgar Allan Poe invites the

reader to a journey, a journey to a world where damnation rules – but even if this poetic world of Poe is ruled by damnation, it is not to be forgotten that it is *poetic.* And this poetic quality is what gives a wonderful character to the gloomy and melancholic atmosphere created in "The Raven" by Poe, and via this poetic quality, the author becomes capable of making the reader experience different aspects and levels of damnation; but at the same time, he also saves the reader from this damnation, via "the physical power of words", as quoted above from literary historian Charles Feidelson Jr.

Certainly, the present essay, due to its extension, is not able to explore and discuss all possible dimensions of damnation within the poem. However, examining a possible leitmotif of it and offering a few possible approaches and levels of interpretation from a certain perspective, it may have highlighted a few main aspects of the complex and multi-layered character of "The Raven", which makes it a nearly legendary poem even at an international level and has been arresting the attention of several literary scholars and readers time and again in the past 160 years.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

The Raven

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
`'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, `tapping at my chamber door –
Only this, and nothing more.'

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow; – vainly I had sought to borrow

From my books surcease of sorrow - sorrow for the lost Lenore –
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore –
Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me – filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
`'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door –
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door; –
This it is, and nothing more,'

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
`Sir,' said I, `or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you' – here I opened wide the door; –
Darkness there, and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering,
fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, `Lenore!'
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, `Lenore!'
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
`Surely,' said I, `surely that is something at my window lattice;
Let me see then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore –
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore; –
'Tis the wind and nothing more!'

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore.

Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door –
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door –
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
`Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,' I said, `art sure no
craven.
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore –
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!'
Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning – little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door –
Bird or beast above the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as `Nevermore.'

But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only,
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing further then he uttered - not a feather then he fluttered –
Till I scarcely more than muttered `Other friends have flown
before –
On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.'
Then the bird said, `Nevermore.'

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
`Doubtless,' said I, `what it utters is its only stock and store,
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore –
Till the dirges of his hope that melancholy burden bore
Of "Never-nevermore."'

But the raven still beguiling all my sad soul into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird and bust and door;
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore –
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore
Meant in croaking `Nevermore.'

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er,
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen enser
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
`Wretch,' I cried, `thy God hath lent thee – by these angels he has sent thee
Respite – respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost Lenore!'
Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'

`Prophet!' said I, `thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil! –
Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted –
On this home by horror haunted - tell me truly, I implore –
Is there – is there balm in Gilead? – tell me – tell me, I implore!'
Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'

`Prophet!' said I, `thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us - by that God we both adore –
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,

It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore –
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels name Lenore?'
Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'

`Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!' I shrieked upstarting –
`Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken! - quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!'
Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted – nevermore!

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Creation, Imagination and Metapoetry in "Kubla Khan"

An Essay on the Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Paradigmatic Poem

Introduction

Kubla Khan is one of the best-known works by the famous romantic English poet Samuel Taylor. Many interpretations of the poem are possible, different critics have represented completely different opinions about the message of the work in the past more than 200 years. The aim of the present essay is to approach the poem from one of the numerous points of view, within the frameworks of an in-depth analysis

One of the possible interpretations is *meta-poetry;* that is, poetry written about poetry itself. But before we attempt to explore in detail what motifs seem to support that that the poem is a kind of meta-poetic self-confession, it is worth having a glance at the circumstances under which the work was written, and what comments the author himself later added to it. Henceforth we attempt to summarize what biographical motivations played what roles in the creation of the poem, before we start the in-depth analysis and the exploration of the motifs referring to the meta-poetic character of the work.

Possible Biographical Motivations

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote his poem called *Kubla Khan* in the autumn of 1797, allegedly in a farmhouse near Exmoor, but since it was published only in 1816, it seems to be probable that the author revised it several times before the publication. Coleridge himself claimed that the poem was inspired by and opium-induced dream, as it is implicitly referred to in the secondary title of the poem: *A Vision in a Dream.* Furthermore, it

is also supposed that the imagery of the poem is partly inspired by Marco Polo's reports about his journey to China and the description of the area called "Shangdu" (which is identical with the poem's spot called Xanadu), where Mongolian ruler Kubla Khan really used to have a palace in the 13th century. The description by Marco Polo was included in Samuel Purchas's book entitled *Pilgrimage* (Vol. XI, 231).

As Samuel Coleridge himself writes in his note to the poem:

"In the summer of the year 1797, the Author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farm-house between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in Purchas's Pilgrimage…"

Since the poet himself commented on the composition of the work, it is really probable that he wrote, or at least started to write it under the influence of drugs, or the vision described in the poem was originally really caused by intoxication.

True, Coleridge commented on his own poem after it had been published, he himself gave no explicit interpretation about the message of the work. That is why the poem is debated by many critics, whether it is just a kind of visionary poetry without any kind of previously planned message, just in order to cause aesthetic pleasure to the reader, or although the author himself left no kind of explicit interpretation, there was an underlying conception behind the creation of the mysterious lines, and there is really a kind of very well-developed message under the surface.

From here, as mentioned above, after having a glance at the circumstances under which the work was supposedly composed, we will make an attempt to interpret the poem as a kind of meta-

poetry, a poetic interpretation of poetry, art, and the assignment of the poet himself.

A Possible Interpretation of "Kubla Khan"

The poem is divided into three paragraphs by the author. It starts with the description of a wonderful palace built by Mongolian and Chinese ruler Kubla Khan in Xanadu, a really existing geographical area situated in China. However strange it sounds, a loose historical background is observable behind the dream-like vision set into poetry, since the Khan was a real historical personality, and the palace described in the overture of the poem really existed in some form. Outside the visionary palace a holy river, the Alph is flowing into the dark, "sunless sea", as Coleridge writes. Then the poem continues with the description of the "fertile grounds" near the palace, and it also turns out that the building is surrounded by ancient forests and hills. To sum it up, the first paragraph describes a historical, but at the same time seemingly supernatural and mythical, majestic world, dominated by Kubla Khan and his "pleasure dome". This world seems to be a static picture where everything is unchanged, like a timeless, painting-life place, where the dimension of time does not exist, or at least it cannot be observed, a kind of empire of eternity. It must be mentioned that in the first paragraph the poetic speaker describes the sight as a spectator from outside, he is not an active character, is not present in the world where the dream-like settings exist.

However, in the second paragraph of the poem a drastic, dramatic change of view can be observed:

"But oh ! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place ! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!..."

That is, a little further from the fairy-tale like, majestic and idyllic palace of the Khan the speaker describes a hell-like, mysterious and ominous environment, "a savage place", which is beyond the boundaries of the area that is dominated by Kubla and his "pleasure dome". Pagan-like, supernatural forces appear in the poem, breaking out from the depth, disturbing the idyll of the world outlined in the first paragraph. A source of a fountain is described that feeds a river that floods through trees and rocks, and this river finally inundates Kubla's gardens. As the last lines of the second paragraph describe:

"And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!"

That is, as the water inundates Kubla Khan's wonderful domain, the ruler hears voices, "ancestral voices", supposedly the voice of the spirits of his ancestors, who remind him that the flood is just a kind of prognostication, and he will soon have to face war against something or someone. Summarising it, the second paragraph is a kind of contrast to the first, in which the destruction, the annihilation of the idyllic and seemingly perfect land described by the first paragraph is outlined. However perfect and visionary the domain of Kubla Khan was, it was destroyed by a flood, probably motivated by mysterious, supernatural forces that might have been envious of the Khan's power, as he was a mortal human, despite what he had possessed and what he had achieved, he could not reach as much power as certain supernatural forces, maybe gods who punished him for having wanted too much.

In the third, last paragraph of the poem the speaker continues to describe what happened after the palace was destructed by the flood, he claims that:

"The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;

Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!"

That is, the shadow of the dome was reflected by the water, and in vain it got destroyed, some kind of wonderful sight emerged from the water, and in some form the palace (and possibly the ruler himself) re-created itself (and himself) in another dimension of existence.

Finally, suddenly the poetic speaker shifts into first person singular, starts to narrate in a much more personal voice, appears as not a simple narrator, but as a kind of character of the poem. As Coleridge writes: "In a vision once I saw…", that is, the speaker acknowledges in a way that all that he described in the first two paragraphs was a kind of poetic vision, as was the "Abyssinian maid" playing a dulcimer mentioned in the further lines of the poem. The speaker claims that if he had the capability to recall the music played by the mysterious maid, than he would be able to reconstruct Kubla Khan's visionary palace from mere music, and he would be able to become as enormous and powerful as Kubla Khan himself. The very last lines of the poem:

"And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise."

That is, it is described how powerful and fearful the poetic speaker himself would become if he were able to reconstruct the palace and gain the power of Kubla Khan. A possible interpretation is that he could even become one with Kubla Khan

in some kind of supernatural, timeless dimension, he himself could become the mythical ruler.

Concluding Remarks – Meta-poetry in the Poem

The poetic speaker himself could become much more than he is in mortal, human reality, and if we attempt to interpret the poem as a kind of meta-poetry, a work about the creative power of poets, we might even risk the statement that Samuel Taylor Coleridge (and all other great poets in his world view) are all Kubla Khans, who have the power to create and dominate within the world of imagination. Since the poem itself is a mixture of dream and vision, as the author himself claimed, everything is possible in the world described in it. Although Kubla Khan is the powerful ruler of a seemingly perfect and dream-like world, he has to face the destruction of his domain, but somehow all of it resurrects in a new form. Poets, who are all creators and rulers of their own imaginary worlds, may have to face the destruction of what is important to them. But on the other hand, if they are real artist, they have the power the re-create their own worlds, their own works of art, even if they are destructed time by time. But no matter how many times one's imaginary world is destructed, the eternal power of art is somehow outside the dimension of time, and poets must be able to possess this kind of power. The destruction of Kubla Khan's palace and the flood can also be interpreted as the destructive power of time that shows no mercy towards anything mortal. But since the Khan / the poet (?) is a man of exceptional artistic abilities, he has the power and the courage to fight against time and resurrect from total destruction and finally reach a kind of eternity via his creative power and works of art.

Since the search for eternity and the cult of geniuses were amongst the key characteristics of the period of the Romantics, Coleridge's poem may be read as a kind of *romantic guideline* for poets, a meta-poetic work that reminds artists that eternity can be reached if they are really talented enough and brave enough to

fight against the destructive power of time and human mortality, not merely as a vision-dream-like poem that perhaps causes aesthetical pleasure to the all-time reader, but its real message is hard or even impossible to decode.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Kubla Khan

Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round;
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:

And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!
The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

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The Motif of Death in William Butler Yeats's Poetry after 1920

Introduction

William Butler Yeats the well-known Irish poet wrote more and more about death (not only about the possibility of his own personal death) in the late period of his life, after 1920.

The motif of human mortality appears in many poems from the late period of his poetry. The aim of the present essay is to select and analyse a few pieces from among his most important works, supporting the statement that death, passing of life and destruction together with it became a key motif in his late poems. But before we start the in-depth analysis of separate poems by the author, it is worth having a glance at the general tendencies and changes that are characteristic of Yeats's poetry, mainly after 1920.

General Changes in the Poetic Style of W. B. Yeats's Late Poems

Yeats is considered to be one of the most significant poets writing in English by many literary critics. In the beginning of his poetic career he wrote his poems mainly in classical verse forms. He is considered to be one of the latest romantic and one of the first modernist authors at the same time. His earlier poems are "conventionally poetic", as it can easily be proven by examining his first volumes. His early poetry is considered late-romantic in many senses, since it is largely based on Irish folklore and Celtic Myths. Nevertheless, in his three volumes titled In the Seven Woods, The Green Helmet and Responsibilities that are from the middle period of his poetic lifework he uses a more direct approach to his themes and writes in a much more personal

voice. The experience of getting old is a determining motif in the last twenty years of his poetry; for example, in his poem called The Circus Animals' Desertion, he describes what inspired his late works:

"Now that my ladders gone
I must lie down where all the ladders start
In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart"

In his works after 1920 Yeats deals much more with contemporary problems than topics deriving from myths and folklore, and he mentions his son and his daughters in his late poems more and more frequently.

Some literary critics also state that the author spanned the transition from the 19th century into the 20th century and he created a kind of bridge between romanticism and modernism. All in all, nearly all of literary critics agree that Yeats's poetic world view derived from a wide range of sources, just to mention a few from among them, Hinduism, Christianity, Voodooism, Romanticism and Modernism, many social and political trends, etc. Such a mixture of ideas served as the basis of his late poetry as well. W. H. Auden criticized his late works as the "deplorable spectacle of a grown man occupied with the mumbo-jumbo of magic and the nonsense of India". Yeats did not trust in human intellectuality anymore in his last twenty years, he rather turned to a kind of mysticism and conceived his otherwise very straightforward and deep thoughts in visions, imaginary worlds and timeless pictures. His volume published in 1925, titled simply 'A Vision' illustrates his delusion of cold intellectuality in a very spectacular way. A kind of dramatic transformation can be observed in the change of his style. His last poetry volumes (The Tower – 1928; The Winding Stairs – 1929; and New Poems – 1938) contained some of the most significant images of the twentieth-century poetry, and his Last Poems are considered the best pieces of his lifework.

Although the signs of anti-democracy and the sympathy with Fascism and other political extremities are observable in some of Yeats's late works, his last lines undeniably visualize the rise of Christianity and the coming of a better world after the total destruction of the frail and delusory mortal human world.

As for the motif of death in his poetry, from his late period maybe two poems deserve special attention: Sailing to Byzantium, as a vision of his personal death, and The Second Coming as a kind of vision about the decline and the collective death of the European civilisation. Henceforth we will make an attempt to discuss the two poems mentioned above in detail, focusing on the motif of death and destruction as the key motifs of Yeats's poetry after 1920.

Sailing to Byzantium – Yeat's Vision of Death and Afterlife

Sailing to Byzantium is one of W. B. Yeats's best-known poems, first published in 1928, in the poetry volume titled The Tower. The poem consists of four stanzas, each one is made up of eight ten-syllable lines. It is the description of the poetic speaker's imaginary journey to Byzantium, the capital of the ancient South-Roman Empire, a kind of homeland of eternity in the poem. It is a kind of vision about what can happen to an elderly artist after his death, whether or not he can achieve the dream of probably all artists in the world, eternity. Many critics parallel this one of Yeats's poems and John Keats's classical romantic poem called Ode on a Grecian Urn, since both of them are based on the contrast of human mortality and eternity that may be reached by becoming one with art.

The first stanza of the poem is an introduction in which the poetic speaker describes the mortal world and his former life which he is soon to leave for the sake of another, probably much better and higher form of existence. The speaker describes his mortal life as a land that he does not like and has no more place within it. „That is no country for old men…", writes Yeats

immediately in the first line, as a kind of delusion of the whole mortal existence.

''In one another's arms, birds in the trees
– Those dying generations – at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies."

Yeats depicts his whole existence as a kind of seemingly happy, but superficial and declining world in which the circulation of life and death is permanent, but everything must die and nearly nothing represents an eternal value; besides, the "monuments of unaging intellect" are not respected at all, they are "neglected" in the "sensual music"; that is, it is much easier for everyone to think of momentary joys and enjoy life as long as possible instead of thinking about what is valuable and what is not, what is worth dealing with and what is not. Physical joys are much more important than intellectual values, and the poet is disappointed at this kind of world view in his old age. It is also possible that Yeats described not only the human existence in general, but the situation of his own Ireland and his own age. As it can be read in Encyclopedia Britannica:

"[The poem] is grounded in literal meaning as well, for in 1924 the ailing Yeats left Ireland, 'no country for old men,' to view Byzantine mosaics in Italy"

The second stanza of the poem describes the aged man as "a paltry thing, a tattered coat upon a stick"; that is, as a pitiful and helpless creature who has no more power and is subjected to the ignorant and unfair world. According to the poetic speaker, the only chance of an old man to rise up from his pitiful situation is to create artefacts and trying to redeem himself with the power of poetry from his mortality. But in order to be able to do so, an old

man has to "learn" a kind of magical song from the monuments mentioned in the first stanza. That is why the elderly poet confesses that, as he writes at the end of the stanza:

"And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
to the holy city of Byzantium."

That is, the elderly poet finally arrives at Byzantium, the holy place where it becomes possible to get rid of his tired, mortal human body and liberate his soul, and finally become one with his own art, gaining a kind of eternity and immortality. Concerning Byzantium, Encyclopedia Britannica writes:

"For Yeats, ancient Byzantium was the purest embodiment of transfiguration into the timelessness of art" (Britannica). While Byzantium has historically been known to be the art and cultural successor of Rome, the speaker also refers to this place as a "holy city".

The third stanza describes the poetic speaker's vision after he finally arrived at Byzantium. He asks "the sages", the wise men of Byzantium to come down to him from God's "holy fire" and become the "singing masters of his soul", and he begs to them to liberate his soul from his dying body at the same time. The "holy fire" represents the supernatural and timeless character of Byzantium, the power through which one can liberate himself from his or her mortal constraints and enter into a higher form of existence. It can be seen as a metaphor similar to the Purgatory in the Holy Bible, in which the soul is cleansed, in this case not unconditionally from its sins, but from everything that bound it to its former world, making it capable of reaching eternity. The motif of the fire can also be treated as a similar motif to the fire of the Phoenix, a mythical bird that is consumed by fires time and again, but always resurrects from its own ashes. The poetic speaker also wants to be annihilated on the one hand, but on the

other hand he wants to gain the capability of resurrection in another dimension of existence. He is "fastened to a dying animal", his own mortal and tired human body, and he evidently has to break out of it if he really wants to belong to the supernatural existence, the eternity of Byzantium. Encyclopedia Britannica writes:

"The old man of 'Sailing to Byzantium' imagined the city's power as being able to 'gather him into the artifice of eternity' – representative of or embodying all knowledge, linked like a perfect machine at the centre of time."

The fourth stanza is a kind of continuation of the poetic speaker's prayer for being granted the capability of reaching a higher form of existence. He expresses his desire that once he was finally transformed by the "holy fire", he would never like to return into any kind of "natural form", but would rather become a kind of mechanic golden bird that is able to entertain "the drowsy Emperor" (of Byzantium) "keeping him awake", singing about "what is past, passing or to come". That is, he wants to become something that is able to sing the song of time itself, some kind of embodiment of eternity against human mortality, even if it is something lifeless, something mechanical, as if he wanted to somehow unite the features of organic, biological (and necessarily mortal) life with the features of timelessness, eternity and majesty, but if it is not possible to achieve in a form similar to organic life, then let it be mechanic and inorganic. The motifs of "hammered gold" and the "Grecian goldsmiths" strongly resemble to the imagery of Keats's Ode on a Grecian Urn, as mentioned above. The ancient land of Greece and Byzantium appears in both poem as some kind of embodiment of a higher form of life, existence and culture that survive human mortality, but only artists can reach this kind of existence via their works of art, which is in Yeats's case is mainly poetry, whereas in Keats's case all manifestations of art are covered. Furthermore, in the last

stanza Yeats identifies himself as a kind of seer who can see the events of the past, sees through the events of the present and is also capable of predicting the events of the future; but since he is in possession of the state of eternity, time is already only a relative category for him.

To sum it up, Sailing to Byzantium is one of the most significant pieces of William Butler Yeats's poetry after 1920. It is one of the key poems as for the motif of death in his poetic work from the examined period. Although the poetic speaker, as an elderly man, predicts his death in a certain way, it is not simply the prediction of physical death, but the vision of an artist about what is possible after death and how it is possible to escape from death and complete destruction. In the poem Yeats does not see his personal death in the future as something that must be feared of, but as a kind of possibility to leave a frail and valueless world at which the elderly poet is already disappointed in order to enter a new reality dominated by perfection and eternity, where only the chosen ones, that is, only artists can reach after their death, becoming one with their works of art. As an artist, Yeats optimistically thinks that his death will not be the death of a simple mortal human, but he will finally become one of the chosen ones who can experience a higher form of existence beyond the mortal human world and finally enter the gates of Byzantium, the holy city where artists can unite with their art, as a kind of reward for their lifelong work in the mortal earth.

Having attempted to make an analysis of the presence of the poet's personal death in Yeats's poetry via examining Sailing to Byzantium, henceforth we will make an attempt to discover the motif of collective death in his lifework, via the analyses of his poem The Second Coming.

The Second Coming – The Vision of Collective Death

The Second Coming was first published in November 1920, in The Dial, and afterwards in Yeats's poetic volume entitled *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921). Strong religious

symbolism is used in the poem in order to pinpoint the decline of the European culture and visualise the prediction of the collective death of the western culture or the whole humanity. It is based on a belief that civilisation is nearing to a turning point around the second millennium, the second coming of Jesus Christ, according to the Holy Bible.

The poem was supposedly written as a kind of aftermath of the First World War, and also strongly inspired by the French and German revolutions, and the Russian Revolution of 1917.

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world…"

The poem, as we can see, starts with an in-medias-res-like overture, a vision-like description of what is in process at the (timeless) moments of the poetic narration. The first passage of the poem is not else but a series of chaotic, ominous pictures, according to which nothing is the same as used to be, something has drastically changed and the world is breaking into pieces, is sinking into anarchy. It is to be mentioned that Yeats uses the word "gyre" in the first line of the poem, a word that is also used in Sailing to Byzantium and several of Yeats's poems. According to Yeats's own explanation, by "gyre" he means two conical spirals, one of them situated within the other. The term is to express Yeats's theory of history, which is present in his 1925 poetic value titled *A Vision*.

In the beginning of the second passage the speaker of the poem stops and establishes the following:

"Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming!"

Yeats speaks about some revelation that turns out to be the Second Coming. Then the series of chaotic and ominous scenes is continuing, a sphinx or sphinx-like beast is outlined within the lines of the poem:

"...somewhere in the sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds...."

As Yeats himself claimed it, the notion of such a beast had long captivated his mind even before he wrote The Second Coming, around 1904, but later he finally wrote it down in his poem. Litarary critic Yvor Winters writes about the poem:

"…we must face the fact that Yeats' attitude toward the beast is different from ours: we may find the beast terrifying, but Yeats finds him satisfying – he is Yeats' judgment upon all that we regard as civilized. Yeats approves of this kind of brutality."

That is, the beast described in the poem can be interpreted as a kind of executioner of human civilization who comes to punish instead of Jesus Christ, and the Second Coming, as the title says, is his arrival to earth. A creature that will cause the total destruction of humanity, but in order that a higher form of existence can evolve after everything frail and mortal has perished.

Yeats himself writes in his notes to the poem:

"The end of an age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to that of its greatest contraction. At the present moment the life gyre is

sweeping outward, unlike that before the birth of Christ which was narrowing, and has almost reached its greatest expansion."

The poem is closed down with a question:

"And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

That is, maybe even the poetic speaker himself does not really know what is coming and what will really happen, but evidently something that must happen out of human will. All in all, it is evidently a kind of vision of complete destruction and collective death, but similar to Sailing to Byzantium, a kind of optimistic end is possible even after collective death. If everything mortal is destroyed, perhaps a new world can evolve after the old one is finally judged, punished and annihilated. Annihilation is the precondition of a new beginning, and just like in the case of his own death, he also hopes for a better and higher form of existence after the collective death of the whole humanity.

Interestingly, an article was published in the near past, in New York Times that paralleled the imagery of the poem and the permanent wars in the Middle East. That is, it is possible that the prediction of Yeats from 1920 seems to become reality in some way, at least partly, if it is interpreted as the prediction of a destructing war that once will break out in the Middle East; namely in the ancient land of the Holy Bible where Jesus Christ was once born.

Concluding Remarks

Although many of the motifs of death appear in several poems of William Butler Yeats after 1920, in the last period of his oeuvre, Sailing to Byzantium and The Second Coming are amongst the best known and the most salient poems in which death and destruction appear as key motifs. As the poet started growing old, death and passing became more and more important topics for

him in his poetry. But he did not treat death – at least not in all of his poems – as simply the end of life, but as a necessary prerequisite to a new beginning, the gate to a new existence that might be much higher and much better than the mortal, human existence in which all of us have to live and the constraints of which all of us have to face every day. As a poet, he believed in the idea that man can break out of the constraints of human existence – body, mortality, old age, frailty, weakness, the barriers of time and place, etc. – and gain the capability of entering a new, supernatural world via the power of art. As a matter of fact, Yeats is not at all the first poet who writes down his thoughts about how one can reach immortality through arts, but as one of the most significant poets of the twentieth centuries, he writes about it in a very original and eloquent manner, setting an example to other poets and artists about the power of arts and talent that can even overcome death and passing, if one strongly believes in it.

It is also worth mentioning that although the strong artistic self-awareness is apparent in several of Yeats's poems written before his death, as in the two works discussed above, he did not call himself in each of his works a prophet or artist. In his last poems written not long before his death he does not deal with afterlife so much, but as an old man, reconciles himself to the fact that he must die, just like others.

As he writes in one of his short, haiku-like final poems that was allegedly written down as his own prospective epitaph:

"Cast a cold eye
on life, on death.
Horseman, pass by!"

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A Personal Essay on Intertextual and Personal Relations Depicted in Ted Hughes's Poem "Wuthering Heights"

The poem called *Wuthering Heights* by English Ted Hughes was published in the volume *Birthday Letters* in 1998. The last poetry volume of the author is a kind of correspondence to his dead wife, American poet Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide in 1963. *Wuthering Heights* is one of the 88 poems addressing, in fact, Sylvia Plath's spirit after her death. That is why it may not be so hazardous in the case of such a personal and biographically motivated collection of poems to state that the poetic speaker of the texts is not fictional, but *he* is in essence identical to Ted Hughes, the author's biographical self.

Wuthering Heights by Ted Hughes shows many characteristics of intertextuality, because it is also partly based on the novel by Emily Brontë; furthermore, Sylvia Plath herself also wrote a poem under the same title, and Hughes's final volume of poetry is also partly treated by literary critics as the mixture of the two author's poetry, an explicit personal and poetic dialogue between them and their literary works, since *Wuthering Heights* is not the only poem within the volume that has the same title as one of Sylvia Plath's poems.

The poem opens with a simple statement: "*Walter was guide*.", then it turns out very early to the reader that the poem is, in fact, a kind of narrative text, recording an event from the common life of Hughes and Plath, narrating it from the point of view of Hughes. As the text goes on, it becomes clear that the poetic speaker is remembering his and his wife's journey to the Yorkshire moors, the land where Emily Brontë's romantic novel takes place and where Brontë herself grows up. The setting is the ruin of a house, probable the ruin of *the* house that is documented

as Wuthering Heights in Brontë's novel. The event narrated in the poem probably took place in reality and it is not only the product of Hughes's poetic imagination, that is why it can be stated that the writing of the poem (as the majority of the poems included in *Birthday Letters)* had strong biographical motivations. Hughes's speaker speaks to *Sylvia Plath directly*, that is why the poem shows similarities to a letter, a monologue, or to a conversation of which only one party can be read / heard by the reader. The speaker compares the addressee to novelist Emily Brontë herself and meditates on what her life was like in the moor before she died and what motivations she may have had to write her immortal novel *Wuthering Heights*. He supposes that Plath, as a female author and fellow poet, had the same ambitions and the same feelings as Brontë had had once, when they visited the scene of the novel. "*Weren't you twice as ambitious as Emily*?", asks Hughes's speaker from his dead wife.

The alter ego of Sylvia Plath described and spoken to in the poem seems to be a young, energetic and ambitious woman author who is meditating at the birthplace of her literary predecessor (?) and, at the same time, at the scene of her world-renowned novel. The scene of the poem is a group of ruins, "*among the burned out, worn-out remains of failed efforts and failed hopes*". These lines probably refer to Emily Brontë's tragic personal faith, since she died at young age and became an appreciated, canonised author only after her death. According to Hughes, his wife probably did not want to have the same destiny as Emily Brontë, on the contrary, she wanted to become and appreciated woman author in her life. (Examining the biographical data of Plath, it seems to be completely true, she always wanted to spasmodically become a professional writer.) "*The future had invested in you*", claims Hughes's speaker in the text, acknowledging that he himself knew that time that his wife was a really talented poet, just like he himself, and had the chance to become one of the greatest poets writing in English language in the 20th century. He also remembers how quickly

Plath became inspired and with what a heave she wrote her poems. Comparing to Emily Brontë, Sylvia is described in the poem as a strong, decisive, ambitious representative of the literature of the present, whereas Brontë appears as a ghost-like, bitter, shadowy figure representing the past. The poem narrates that Plath had a great chance to achieve what Brontë had never managed to achieve in her life as a woman author, under the social circumstances and oppression over women intellectuals in the 19th century. Not only two biographical people, two woman authors are contrasted by Hughes's poetic speaker, but also two ages, the literatures and the circumstances of the 19th and the 20th centuries, the present and past.

The environment described in the poem, the whole gloomy landscape of the Yorkshire moors, the wild and romantic scene of the dramatic novel *Wuthering Heights* gives a very dark and ominous atmosphere to the whole poem. Intertextuality also shows very spectacular and demonstrative power inside the poem, recalling and borrowing the atmosphere and impressiveness of Emily Brontë's novel (and as mentioned above, also intertextually referring to Sylvia Plath's poem having the same title, and having a similarly strong, obscure and dark atmosphere.)

Towards the end of the poem Hughes / the poetic speaker even explicitly refers to Emily Brontë's spirit, supposing that she was envious of Plath's poetic ambitions there, that time: *"What would stern / Dour Emily have mode of your frisky glances / And your huge hope? (…) And maybe a ghost, trying to hear your words, / Peered from the broken mullions / And was stilled.* (…)". That is, Hughes's speaker meditates in the poem what Brontë's ghost (who was evidently *there* might have thought about Plath and her ambitions as the poet of the future and aliveness. Similarly to the novel *Wuthering Heights*, Hughes consciously presents a ghost in his remembrance / meditation-like poem in order to create the same gothic, oppressive, dark atmosphere for the reader – seemingly nothing happens on the surface, but it maybe stated

that in the deep structure of the poem ominous powers are hiding and waiting for the emergence.

There may be another possible interpretation of the poem that is far beyond the supposition that it is a mere remembrance, a letter- and / or dramatic monologue-like poem written by Hughes to his dead wife, just for the sake of remembrance or dialogue with Plath. It must be mentioned that it is very characteristic of the poems published in the volume *Birthday Letters* that they are very suggestive, ponderous works of art with strong subjectivity of the speaker within them, opening several possible layers of interpretation, apart from mere biographical facts or events recorded within them. It is common knowledge that the marriage of the two poets ended tragically, and – mainly due to the nervous disease of Sylvia Plath – they lived a scandalous, dissonant and extremely passionate life, and Plath had several attempted suicides before her final one causing her death. Hughes may have selected the title for his poem in order to deliberately refer to the contradictions and passionate character of his and Plath's marriage before Sylvia's death, because *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë is also a story about a contradictory, extremely passionate love that has a very tragic ending. It might not be a very exaggerated assumption to suppose that Ted Hughes deliberately wanted to parallelise his and Sylvia Plath's contradictory, passionate and tragic love relationship with the romantic relationship of Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw narrated in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* – expressing that he and Sylvia had their own "private Wuthering Heights", and their personal, emotional life was very similar with the strong, extreme emotions resulting in bitterness and tragedies. As it is well-known, in the novel Catherine Earnshaw also dies, and Heathcliff becomes an extremely bitter and vengeful, nearly demonic man, taking a lifelong revenge on the whole Earnshaw family for the loss of his love. It is an interesting biographical fact that although Hughes himself married again some years later following the tragedy, he could certainly never work up the death of Plath.

Reading his oeuvre, The traces of guilty conscience and sense of responsibility are also observable in his poetry written after Plath's death – the letter-like poems published in *Birthday Letters,* a few months before Hughes death, can be considered as the peak of Hughes's confessional poetry about his relationship with Plath and its contradictions, these 88 poems including *Wuthering Heights,* the poem analysed in the present essay, are the most explicit and confessional pieces of Hughes's poetry, exploring his own personal attitude towards Plath's suicide. Therefore, it can also be stated that the poetry and the private life of two individuals are mixed within the poetic world created by *Birthday Letters,* the poem called *Wuthering Heights* among them. Perhaps due to the strongly personal tone of the poems, as mentioned above, it is also hard to decide on whether the poem analysed is to be considered as a *letter*; that is, a mainly written piece of text, or rather a sort of poetic / dramatic *monologue* addressing (the ghost of?) Sylvia Plath; that is, a piece of text that can also be a manifestation of *spoken poetry* of full value that does not only exist in a written form, and is not only to be *read*.

Wuthering Heights might be considered as one of the most impressive pieces within the volume *Birthday Letters*. It refers to two other pieces of literature with the means of intertextuality; offering several possible layers of interpretations, as mentioned above, far beyond the biographical background of the author, despite the fact it is definitely a personal, confession-like work of poetry in which the poetic speaker and the biographical self of the author can be considered to be nearly identical. The poem ends up with a gloomy, multi-layered and obscure closure, raising a sense of *unfinishedness* in the reader's mind, probably consciously increasing the suggestive aesthetic power of the text. The unfinished character of the text also gives several possibilities of interpretation of different depths, making the reader be involved in the world of the poems, completing the details that are only implicitly referred to inside it.

Within the frameworks of the present essay, certainly, we do not have the chance to discuss Ted Hughes's poetic lifework in detail, but focusing on the poem called *Wuthering Heights* we may have managed to get an overview about the probably most prominent piece of Hughes's lifework, his final poetry volume entitled *Birthday Letters*. Furthermore, we may also see how a love with a tragic ending can produce wonderful pieces of poetry, and how a personal tragedy like the love of Hughes and Plath, the two maybe greatest English-speaking poets of the 20th century could serve as a background to great and valuable poetry volume, constituting a part of world literature. Moreover, parallelising the real events of Hughes and Plath's biography and the story narrated in Emily Brontë's novel, it may also become clear that literature is not always so far from life – as it is often said by people of letters, it is not always literature that imitates reality, but on the contrary – reality may also imitate literature, and although such cases can be very tragic, at least it may become clear that literature is not, should not be something completely abstract and unintelligible. On the contrary, literature is about, is based on our everyday human life, serving as an inherent constituent part of our own reality.

TED HUGHES

Wuthering Heights

Walter was guide. His mother's cousin
Inherited some Brontë soup dishes.
He felt sorry for them. Writers
Were pathetic people. Hiding from it
And making it up. But your transatlantic elation
Elated him. He effervesced
Like his rhubarb wine a bit too long:
A vintage of legends and gossip

About those poor lasses. Then,
After the Rectory, after the chaise longue
Where Emily died, and the midget hand-made books,
The elvish lacework, the dwarfish fairy-work shoes,
It was the track from Stanbury. That climb
A mile beyond expectation, into
Emily's private Eden. The moor
Lifted and opened its dark flower For you too. That was
satisfactory.
Wilder, maybe, than ever Emily ever knew it.
With wet feet and nothing on her head
She trudged that climbing side towards friends –
Probably. Dark redoubt
On the skyline above. It was all
Novel and exhilarating to you.
The book becoming a map. "Wuthering Heights".
Withering into perspective. We got there
And it was all gaze. The open moor,
Gamma rays and decomposing starlight
Had repossessed it
With a kind of blackening smoulder. The centuries
Of door-bolted comfort finally amounted
To a forsaken quarry. The roofs'
Deadfall slabs were flaking, but mostly in place,
Beams and purlins softening. So hard
To imagine the life that had lit
Such a sodden, raw-stone cramp of refuge.
The floors were a rubble of stone and sheep droppings,
Doorframes, windowframes –
Gone to make picnickers' fires or evaporated.
Only the stonework – black. The sky – blue.
And the moor-wind flickering.
(indentation) The incomings,
The outgoings – how would you take up now

The clench of that struggle? The leakage
Of earnings off a few sickly bullocks
And a scatter of crazed sheep. Being cornered
Kept folk here. Was that crumble of wall
Remembering a try at a garden? Two trees
Planted for company, for a child to play under,
And to have something to stare at. Sycamores –
The girth and spread of valley twenty-year-olds,
They were probably ninety.
(indentation) You breathed it all in
With jealous, emulous sniffings. Weren't you
Twice as ambitious as Emily? Odd
To watch you, such a brisk pedant
Of your globe-circling aspirations,
Among those burned-out, worn-out remains
Of failed efforts, failed hopes –
Iron beliefs, iron necessities,
Iron bondage, already
Crumbling back to the wild stone.
(indentation) You perched
In one of the two trees
Just where the snapshot shows you.
Doing as Emily never did. You
Had all the liberties, having life.
The future had invested in you –
As you might say of a jewel
So brilliantly faceted, refracting

Every tint, where Emily had stared
Like a dying prisoner.
And a poem unfurled from you
Like a loose frond of hair from your nape
To be clipped and kept in a book. What would stern
Dour Emily have made of your frisky glances
And your huge hope? Your huge

Mortgage of hope. The moor-wind
Came with its empty eyes to look at you,

And the clouds gazed sidelong, going elsewhere,
The heath-grass, fidgeting in its fever,
Took idiot notice of you. And the stone,
Reaching to touch your hand, found you real
And warm, and lucent, like that earlier one.
And maybe a ghost, trying to hear your words,
Peered from the broken mullions
And was stilled. Or was suddenly aflame
With the scorch of doubled envy. Only
Gradually quenched in understanding.

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The Poem Locked in Itself

On Paul Celan's Poetics and Poetry

Paul Celan, originally named Paul Antschel, the German-speaking Jewish poet from Bukovina was evidently one of the most prominent figures of the post-war European literature. Although he is frequently called the poet of the Holocaust, many literary historians agree that apart from his well-known poem entitled *Deathfugue* (*Todesfuge*) and his early, by and large understandable poetry, his late and much more mature, clearer poetry is more interesting for literary studies.

According to Jacques Derrida Celan was one of the most important poets of the 20th century, because all of his poems were *dated*; i. e., they were in a sense separated from the dimension of time and place, reaching some artistic eternity (Derrida 1986: 46). Furthermore, the hermetic and mysterious poetry that Paul Celan wrote mainly after 1960, as it is also mentioned by one of the most prominent Hungarian translators of Celan László Lator, Celan's poetry was completely appropriate for the ways of analysis of the new trends in literary scholarship spreading in the 1960-70s, such as Deconstruction, Hermeneutics or Discourse Analysis. Although Lator appreciates Celan's literary importance, but it may seem that he also sees Celan's poetry too theoretical as for his concepts about language and the expressibility or the lack of expressibility via language (Lator 1980: 94).

According to Imre Oravecz, another Hungarian poet and literary critic who also translated some poems by Celan into Hungarian, Celan's poetic reality is not based on experience, and it can be grasped only from a philosophical perspective. Oravecz defines Celan's poetic language as a 'meta-language', a language about language, poetry about poetry itself (Oravecz: 1970: 292).

I myself believe that Celan's literary importance is constituted by the fact that he managed to create a kind of poetry that did not exist before, although certainly he, just like other authors in literary history, had his predecessors and sources; that is, his poetry is not completely original, but completely original poetry, due to the continuity in literary history simply does not exist.

Celan's late poetry – speaking about the volumes and poems published after his volume of poetry entitled *Atemwende – Breathturn* is mainly constituted by short, hermetic, hardly decidable poems containing several intertextual and cultural references. The system of references and the recurrent, but difficultly interpretable motifs of this poetry create a poetic world within each poems in which the meanings in the traditional sense may overlap, or even contradict each other, and the concept of 'meaning' in the traditional sense may even disappear in certain poems, making the interpretation difficult or even impossible.

Although, as mentioned above, Celan, due to his strong Jewish identity and his controversial relationship to the Jewish religion and traditions, is considered one of the most important poet of the Holocaust, according to the point of view of most of the analyses about his work it is not only to be considered a poetic lifework about the tragedy of the Jewish people, and his poetry has a much stronger character that derives from deeper, from more abstract lyrical and spiritual depths, giving a more universal message and a sense out of certain contexts to this kind of poetry. As Hungarian Celan-scholar Béla Bacsó states it at several places in his monograph, Celan's poems cannot be evidently included in some category of literary history or theory – the poems has their own world enclosed into themselves, and this world is really hard to be discovered by the readers (Bacsó 1996).

Although in his early poems Celan uses many poetic images and easily decidable references (e. g., in the volumes entitled *Mohn und Gedächtnis – Poppy and Memory, Von Schwelle zu Schwelle – From Threshold to Threshold, Der Sand aus der Urnen – Sand from the Urns, Sprachgitter – Speech Grills*), around the end of the author's life, in the 1950–60s the extension of his poem decreased, their contextualising elements gradually faded away, and only the nucleus of the poems remained for the reader. In his early poems Celan knowingly and deliberately made poetic confessions about the Holocaust, the controversies of Jewish, the horrors of the Second World War and the social-spiritual breakdown after the war. It is testified by his probably best known poem entitled *Todesfuge – Fugue of Death* that would be hard not to symbolically interpret as a poem about the horror's in Hitler's Germany. However, as Celan's poetry made headway, concreteness and easy interpretability gradually disappeared from his works. Undoubtedly, *Todesfuge* is one of the most significant poems of the 20th century written in German; however, the later products of Celan's poetry from which metaphors and lyrical material nearly vanish may be much more interesting for literary analyses.

Postmodern trends of literary studies like Deconstruction, Discourse Analysis and Hermeneutics became widespread around the date of Celan's death in 1970. Although Celan himself is not or only party to be considered a *post-modern* author, it is doubtless that Deconstruction, the most known literary trend that nearly or completely ignores the context of a literary work rather concentrating on internal structures of the text itself proved to be the best one for the posterior analysis of Celan's (mainly late) poetic works.

One of the key term of Deconstruction is the ignorance of context, the existence of the text as and independent entity, the other is the instability of meaning, including its permanent re-explainability. If we only examine a few poems of Celan's shorter, fairly late works, we can easily see that they are in fact enclosed structures, poems enclosed into themselves. By poems enclosed into themselves I mean that under one certain layer of meaning of a given poem there is always another, and this way these enigmantic, bizarre poems that most of the times possibly

generate associations in the sensitive readers, creating another text, another poetic world, another system of associations within themselves, even up to infinity.

The lean and hermetic minimalism the semantic depths of Celan's late poetry may highlight the fact that in certain cases the number of possible readings can be very high, even infinite. If we have a glance at, for example, one of Celan's emblematic poems entitled *Unlesbarkeit – Illegible*, we may see that the same poem can be interpreted as a poem of the Holocaust, a decadent poem criticizing the given age, a philosophical poem about the aspects of life, etc., and in many cases, Celan's poems can also be seen as meta-poetic works, poetry bout poetry.

JOHN FELSTINER'S ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

Illegible this
world. Everything doubled.

Staunch clocks
confirm the split hours,
hoarsely.

You, clamped in your depths,
climb out of yourself
for ever.

THE ORIGINAL GERMAN TEXT OF THE POEM:

Unlesbarkeit dieser
Welt. Alles doppelt.

Die starken Uhren
geben der Spaltstunde recht,
heiser.

Du, in dem Tiefstes geklemmt,
entsteigst dir
für immer.

If the world is *illegible*, then the poem itself is also practically illegible – at least in the sense that in vain we *read* the poem, we cannot be certain about the whole sense of the small signs constituting the poems. If the text is, according to the Deconstructionist view, amorf, then practically the poem is able to create new poems within itself – as many new poems as many times we read or re-read, re-think, re-interpret the same text, deconstructing it, dividing it into small elements, then mentally reconstructing it. In the second half of the 20th century, in a world spiritually destroyed, in Europe after the Second World War – but even ignoring the context of time and space, considering the general loss of human ideas and the finite character of obtainable knowledge – poetry does not want to *teach* (docere) anything to people any longer, it does not want to didactically tell what it exactly *means*. Poems rather offer possibilities to the reader for thinking about, creating further poems concealed within themselves, for the continuous revision and re-thinking of everything in the world. In my opinion, it is one of the key points of Paul Celan's poetry, at least as for his semantically deep, short, hermetic late poems. Hermetism and semantic depth can be seen as the poetic embossments of this poetry. Can an artwork have a more universal value if it intends to tell the *untellable* out of the context of time and space, enclosed into itself, creating a poetic world independent of reality? The celanian poetry locks a poem within the poem, but there is another layer under every single poems, giving possibility for permanent re-thinking and re-interpretation of the same texts, granting intellectual and aesthetic experiences to the sensitive reader that was succeeded by few European poets in the 20th century. The weight of the poem is constituted by the fact that its meaning is not stable, it is not fastened to something or somebody – partly in accordance with

Deconstruction, but in fact independently of this given theoretical approach, the poems secede from the author, the age, the culture and the space. It becomes an independent whole withdrawing to its own existence, becoming complete within its own hermetic textual reality within which the sensitive reading is able to generate newer and newer poems, exploring more and more possible semantic layers. It is true that the universal character of these poems appears in abstract and complex form, and the understanding of the texts may require increased attention and sensibility, but if the poem enclosed into itself is finally able to open up to the reader via the reading process, then the semantic richness of the layers opening up, the productivity of the re-interpretable character of the poems is effectively infinite. Celan's short late poems can constitute the nucleus, the starting point of a potential mental textual universe the existence of which is maybe a prominent cornerstone of modern European poetry.

Due to the multi-layered character of Celan's poetry and the hermetism of his poems, however, the translatability of Celan's poetry – unfortunately – becomes questionable, at least up to a certain degree. The question whether or not these complex poems originally written in German can be translated into any other language successfully becomes important and justifiable.

Certainly, as every other poem, Celan's poems can be transliterated from the source language into a given target language in a certain form, as it is discussed by Noémi Kiss in her doctoral dissertation as for the comparison of the different Hungarian translations of Celan's fairly well-known poem *Tenebrae* (Kiss 2003). The problem is rather the fact that in the case of hermetic, enclosed poems, the given translation nearly automatically becomes a certain reading of the translated poem in the given target language – that is, we do not only speak about simple transliteration in the traditional sense. In this case, if a translation is at the same time a reading, an interpretation of a source-language text, the question arises whether the reproduced,

translated poem is able to transmit the same poetic power as the original one, however strong, faithful and aesthetic a translation it may be. Although I do not want to go into details about the Hungarian philological reception of Paul Celan and the translation history of his poems into Hungarian, since the author of the present essay is Hungarian, it may be mentioned that examining some of Celan's poem if they exist in several Hungarian translations, it can be concluded that there can be significant differences between them. The translators do not only translate, but necessarily *interpret* the poetic text in their own native language, and in the case of such a complex, multi-layered poetry the interpretation, the result of the translation process is not always the same. The question is whether the poems enclosed into themselves can be transliterated from one language into another, or the translated poem is already another, partly independent text creating new layers of meaning within the original one, making further readings, mental re-thinking and re-writing possible. Is it language-specific that the poetry of a prominent poet can be transposed to the reader with another native language without or with minimal loss, creating an infinite, or at least nearly infinite textual universe of potential mentally re-formed poems? In my opinion, if I consider the philological facts available in my native language, Hungarian as for the translation of Paul Celan's poetry, Celan's poems considered significant or less significant exist in several good translations by prominent Hungarian poets (László Lator, Gábor Schein, Imre Oravecz, etc., just to mention a few of them), and for the Hungarian-speaking reader the answer of the question asked above is that this lyrically enclosed character of the poem, this hermetism and productive re-interpretability that can be considered on of the cornerstone of Celan's poetry can be mediated between the given languages to a certain degree. Celan's poems enclosed into themselves are not completely lost in translation, but they evidently change, in a way as they are changing via reading.

And if the poem enclosed into itself can be treated as a universal concept, it is independent of the context of time and space, even of the linguistic context. That is, it can be re-created, becoming more universal, and it can be mediated between different cultures.

However, I do not think that what seems to be valid in a German–Hungarian context is necessarily universally valid in a German–English relationship. The main aim of the present study is to examin John Felstiner's English translations of Paul Celan's poem. But before I start examining the concrete English translations, I think that mentioning one thing may also bring as closer to the understanding of the problems deriving from the translation and translatabilty of Celan's hermetic poetry – and this is the poet's concept about the entity that makes it possible for poems to write – *language.*

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Lost in Translation

Possible Problems around the Translatability of Paul Celan's Poems in the Mirror of John Felstiner's English Translations

The translatability of Paul Celan's poetry has been a current problem in literary studies arresting the attention of literary translators and scholars about since the 1980s, not only in Hungary and Europe, but also in the United States.

If we have a glance at George Steiner's opinion about the translatability of Paul Celan's poems, we may see that he approaches the issue with serious doubts. Steiner claims that it is also doubtful whether Celan himself wanted his readers to *understand* his poetry, conceiving his statement connected to the analyses of the poem entitled *Das gedunkelte Splitterecho – The darkened echo-splinter (?).* Steiner writes that meaning is a temporary phenomenon, and the poems can be understood only momentarily, since another interpretation of the same poem will decode the text in a partly or completely different way, exploring different layers and structures of meaning. Literature wants to break out from the frameworks of everyday human language, becoming the author's own idiolect, heading for untranslatability, unrepeatability in another language (Steiner 2005: 158–159).

In her doctoral thesis Noémi Kiss refers to the approaches of Paul de Man and Walter Benjamin (Kiss 2003: 76–77). According to Benjamin, translation is only the temporary dissolution of the alienation of language; at the same time, historically it becomes more canonised, since in an optimal case a translated text cannot be translated further. Translation is a text that has its own identity, serving for *reading* together with the original artwork, constituting the metaphor of reading (De Man 1997: 182–228). However, according to De Man the situation of

the translator is ironic, since the danger of mis-translation, misinterpretation is hiding in every single translation; i. e., translation itself automatically makes re-translation(s) necessary. Translation is not a progress that has a final goal, it has no final result, but each translation is a new station towards the more complete understanding of a given text written in a foreign language, interpreted by the given translator.

According to Noémi Kiss in case of a translation the translator and the reader evidently have to consider the possible differences between the two languages, and in the analysis of a translated poem the text cannot automatically be treated as identical with the original source language poem, and the possible similarities and differences of the source text and the target text must also be examined in a literary analysis (Kiss 2003: 69). The question may arise how much Paul Celan is still *Paul Celan* in a given translation. Would be a more exact statement that a given translation is the common artwork of the poet and the translator, since the translator always necessarily adds something to the original text, and he or she also takes certain elements from the content and semantic structures of the source text, mainly if the literary translator is also a poet who forms the translated text according to his/her own notions, integrating it into his/her own artistic works.

Jacques Derrida claims that the radical differences between languages necessarily mean serious problems for literary translators (Derrida 1997: 119). Noémi Kiss, referring to Derrida quotes the so-called Babel-metaphor according to which translation, at least the exact translation saving every single element of the meaning from one language into another is almost impossible, since different human languages after their evolution constitute enclosed structures, and the passing between them is not completely possible. This approach is very similar to Paul Celan's concept of language – human language generally has its limits and is not able to express everything, then why would it be

possible to *translate* something said or written in a given language into another, similarly imperfect and limited language?

However, if we accept the supposition that translation in the traditional sense is nearly impossible and we had better speak about interpretations, re-writings of a given poem, it may also be stated that translating poetry itself is also poetry, since it does not only transliterate the foreign author's work into the literature and culture of the target language, but it also re-thinks, re-interprets, rewrites the given work, creating another poem that is close to the original one, but it is not identical to the source text. It raises the question whether or not poetry translation can be treated as an intertextual phenomenon, since the translated text evidently refers to the source text, a discourse evolves between them, but the two texts – and it may be agreed by most of literary scholars and translators – cannot be treated as identical structures.

Hans Georg Gadamer states that no-one can be bilingual in the hermeneutic sense of understanding – one's own native language plays a more serious role in understanding; that is, translation should necessarily be a kind of trans-coding of the source text into the mother tongue of the translator (Gadamer 1984: 269–273). Noémi Kiss states about Gadamer's and Benjamin's approach of translation that Gadamer describes understanding, our universal wish to defeat the alienation of language as a permanent act of translation – understanding and translation are a compromise with the alien character of language, recognising that everything can be *understood* only up to a certain degree (Kiss 2003: 155). According to Gadamer's approach the task of the literary translator is to create a third language as a bridge between the source language and the target language, and this bridge language somehow should integrate both of them. Via this process, translation also becomes a historical phenomenon that makes it possible to understand a given text in a given historical age up to a certain degree (Gadamer 1984: 271). Walter Benjamin's concept of translation is very similar to Gadamer's notion – translation gives the chance to a given text to live on,

not only to survive. As the sentences of life are harmonised with the living themselves, without meaning anything for them, the translation of a given text is evolving from the original one (Kiss 2003: 66).

Perhaps the above cited pieces of scholarly literature reveals that the translation Paul Celan's poetry into any language from German is not a simple task for a literary translator, and it may hinder the complete understanding of the texts that they were written in German, in the poet's mother tongue to which he had a controversial relationship and from which he wanted to break out. Is it possible to *translate* poems that intend to destroy even the standards of their own language, heading for something outside human language?

Different scholarly literatures by and large agree that the translations made from Celan's poems, due to the multiple coding, the frequent intertextual references and the obscurity and hermetism ruling between them nearly always have some interpretative nature; that is, the translation of a given text written by Celan also necessarily becomes a reading of the poem.

Hungarian poet and literary historian György Rába states that a kind of 'beautiful faithlessness' can be observed in certain poetry translations comparing them to their original source text, and the translator's own poetic voice frequently speaks from translated poem, combined with the poet's original voice (Rába 1969: 12). That is, a literary translator does not only mechanically transcribe words based on the use of a dictionary, but makes an attempt to decode and understand the text written in the foreign language. Since translation often involves interpretation, the translator has to make decisions – on these grounds, the result of the translation of Celan's or any other author's given poem can be considered as the result of poetic activity, and the translation is not only the author's, but also the translator's artwork that may be integrated into the oeuvre of the translator. A poem can be understood differently by different translators, if a poem exists in several translations in parallel,

then it is nearly necessary that the readings of the same poem in the target language shall also be slightly or completely different.

After examining some aspects of the possible problems around the translation of Paul Celan's poetry, now I attempt to examine some concrete examples of translation within the sphere of the English language – John Felstiner's English transcriptions, beginning with a few earlier poems by Celan, but mainly selecting from the author's more mature late poetry that may be more interesting for scholarly analysis. I would like to begin with one of Celan's emblematic poem entitled *Tenebrae*, which is a reference to the biblical darkness falling upon the world after Jesus Christ's crucifixion.

JOHN FELSTINER'S TRANSLATION

Tenebrae

Near are we, Lord,
near and graspable.

Grasped already, Lord,
clawed into each other, as if
each of our bodies were
your body, Lord.

Pray, Lord,
pray to us,
we are near.

Wind-skewed we went there,
went there to bend
over pit and crater.

Went to the water-trough, Lord.

It was blood, it was
what you shed, Lord.

It shined.

It cast your image into our eyes, Lord.
Eyes and mouth stand so open and void, Lord.

We have drunk, Lord.
The blood and the image that was in the blood, Lord.

Pray, Lord.
We are near.

THE ORIGINAL GERMAN POEM:

Tenebrae

Nah sind wir Herr,
nahe und greifbar.

Gegriffen schon, Herr,
ineinander verkrallt, als wär
der Leib eines jeden von uns
dein Leib, Herr.

Bete, Herr,
bete zu uns,
wir sind nah.

Windschief gingen wir hin,
gingen wir hin, uns zu bücken
nach Mulde und Maar.

Zur Tränke gingen wir, Herr.

Es war Blut, es war,
was du vergossen, Herr.

Es glänzte.

Es warf uns dein Bild in die Augen, Herr,
Augen und Mund stehn so offen und leer, Herr.

Wir haben getrunken, Herr.
Das Blut und das Bild, das im Blut war, Herr.

Bete, Herr.
Wir sind nah.

The above cited poem entitled *Tenebrae* is one piece of Celan's fairly early poetry, full of biblical and other religious references. First of all, the title probably refers to the darkness that fell upon the world after Jesus Christ's death on the cross. It can be interpreted as a so-called counter-psalm or anti-psalm, since it is written in the traditional psalm form (a prayer to God), but it is turned upside down, since it is the poetic speakers, a group of people wandering in the desert who calls up God to pray to *them.* Probably, the poem intends to express the controversies of the world after the Holocaust and the Second World War, suggesting that the traditional order of the world simply turned upside down, and nothing can be considered as holy anymore.

Comparing Felstiner's translation and the original German poem written by Celan it can be seen that the first two lines of the poem are nearly literally identical in the original text and in the translation, the translator even preserves the inversion 'Nah sind wir…' – 'Near are we…'. What can be spectacular as for comparison, in my opinion, at first appears in the seventh line of the poem. 'Pray, Lord…' – 'Bete, Herr…' in itself may mean in English that 'We pray to us, God…'; i. e., in English this traditional form is not unconditionally imperative, whereas in

German it is evidently a second person singular imperative form (or a first person singular declarative form, but it lacks the obligatory grammatical subject 'ich'.). Furthermore, the verb 'beten' in German does not only mean 'pray' in the religious sense, but it also means 'beg' to someone without even any religious connotation – 'beten' and 'beg', since it is spoken about closely related Germanic languages, may also have some common etymology. In the ninth line of the poem, in my opinion, it can be questioned whether the German compound 'windschief' is evidently 'wind-skewed' in English, since it may also mean something like 'chased by wind' or 'hindered by wind', but the translator had to make certain decisions. It may also be one of the remarkable characters of the translation that in the thirteenth line of the poem, while Celan wrote 'Zur Tränke gingen wir…', Felstiner wrote 'Went to the water-trough…', simply omitting the grammatical subject present in German, and it could certainly be also present in the English translation – i. e., the omission of the subject does not seem to be justified, although it may mirror the translator's intention to preserve Celan's fragmented poetic language. In the fourteenth and fifteenth line it seems also that the translator manages to remain faithful to the original version – in German, the lines 'Es war blut, es war, / was du vergossen, Herr.' may either refer to the blood of men that God 'shed' as the punishing God of the Old Testament, or God's, i. e. Jesus Christ's blood that he 'shed' for the salvation of men. As we can see in Felstiner's translation, 'It was blood, it was, / what you shed, Lord.' makes the same interpretation possible, not deciding whether it is the punishing God who 'shed' the blood of probably pagan / disobedient men, or it is God who 'shed' his own blood for the salvation of men. In the twentieth line of the poem it is also interesting that the line 'Wir haben getrunken, Herr.' is 'We have drunk, Lord.' in Felstiner's translation; i. e. the translator even wants to preserve the tense of the original version of the poem – the so-called *Perfekt* is the German counterpart of the English Present Perfect Tense, although little differences may

occur; e. g., in German where there is *Perfekt*, in English there may also be Simple Past in many cases. In the last line it is also interesting that although it is nearly the same as the first line of the poem, there is no inversion: 'Wir sind nah.' Felstiner's translation also preserves this lack of inversion with the very simple sentence 'We are near.'

It may be stated that Felstiner's translation of *Tenebreae* is a fairly exact, form- and content-faithful English transcription of the original poem that can rather be treated as a *translation* in the traditional sense than an interpretation / adaptation. The main reason for this fact may be that this poem is one of Celan's early, linguistically simpler works which I intended to use as an example of this period of the author's poetry, but henceforth I would like to examine with a few later, more mature poems by Celan, comparing them with their English translations.

JOHN FELSTINER'S TRANSLATION:

IN RIVERS north of the future
I cast the net you
haltingly weight
with stonewritten
shadows.

THE ORIGINAL GERMAN POEM:

IN DEN FLÜSSEN nördlich der Zukunft
werf ich das Netz aus, das du
zögernd beschwerst
mit von Steinen geschriebenen
Schatten.

The above poem is one of Celan's much later and much more hermetic poetry that probably means a much larger challenge to any translator. It was published in the volume entitled

Atemwende – Breathturn in 1967, only three years before the author's tragic suicide.

I am aware of the fact that the poem above cannot simply be *analysed* in the traditional way, since it has its own hermetic poetic world; therefore, I only mention that the poetic speaker symbolically casts his net in the rivers in some imaginary country where someone that he calls as 'you' weights his fishing net with 'stonewritten shadows'. Stone is a traditional element of Jewish Mysticism that may have several connotations; e. g., Jewish people often put a stone on the grave of the dead to express their respect and memory felt for them. The shadows may refer to the fact that what appear in the net are not real, only their shadows can be perceived by the speaker – it can be a reference to one of the greatest dilemmas of Celan's poetry, the incapability of language to communicate or express any explicit content. It can be mentioned German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer deals with the topic of the relation of 'you' and 'I' in Paul Celan's poetry, but in the present article I would rather concentrate on the similarities and differences between the original and the translated version of the poem (Gadamer 1993: 421).

It may be a spectacular difference between the original version and the translation of the poem that while Celan starts his poem with the beginning *'In den Flüssen' – 'In the rivers*', Felstiner translates it only as 'In rivers…', omitting the definite article present in German, annihilating (!) the definite character of the poem, placing it into an indefinite landscape. Seemingly it is only one little word, one little difference, but it may change the whole atmosphere of this otherwise very short poem. It is also questionable whether the German very 'aus/werfen' meaning 'to cast out' is simply 'cast' in English, since as if in the German version it were stressed that the poetic speaker 'casts out' his net in the rivers. Whether the German word 'zörgend' is the most appropriately translated into English with the word 'haltingly' may also be a question. It is also interesting that while Celan does not use a compound neologism in his original poem in the

penultimate line while neologisms are very characteristic of his poetry, Felstiner translates the expression 'von Steinen geschriebenen' literally meaning 'written by stones' into a compound neologism 'stonewritten' as if he would like to become *'more celanian'* than Paul Celan himself.

After the short examination of the otherwise also short poem it may be established that there are spectacular differences between the original version and the English transliteration of the same text; i. e., they cannot be considered identical, and their separate analysis may even lead to slightly different readings. Felstiner's English translation has a strongly interpretative character that digresses from Celan's original text, making certain decisions within the process of reading and translation.

JOHN FELSTINER'S TRANSLATION:

TO STAND in the shadow
of a scar in the air.

Stand-for-no-one-and-nothing.
Unrecognized,
for you
alone.

With all that has room within it,
even without
language.

THE ORIGINAL GERMAN POEM:

STEHEN im Schatten,
des Wundenmals in der Luft.
Für-niemand-und-nichts-Stehn.
Unerkannt,
für dich
allein.

Mit allem, was darin Raum hat,
auch ohne
Sprache.

The above cited poem is one of Celan's emblematic work from his late poetry that was also published in the volume entitled *Atemwende – Breathturn.* Although it is also a hermetic and hardly decodably poem, it may be stated that in fact it refers to the task of the poet – 'to stand', under any circumstances, to stand, fight and write, without any reward.

Examining the first two lines it can be spectacular that while Celan writes 'im Schatten des Wundenmals' that literally means 'in the shadow of the scar', Felstiner translates the German definite article into an indefinite article – 'in the shadow of **a** scar'. The definite 'Wundenmal' – 'scar' created by becomes indefinite in the translation, and vie this little modification the whole poem may lose its definite character.

However, despite the seemingly little difference between the original and the translated text, in the second paragraph of the poem the translation and the original version seem to be nearly completely identical. The neologism by Celan 'Für-niemand-und-nichts-Stehn' is translated by Felstiner into 'Stand-for-no-one-and-nothing', although the 'Stehn' – 'stand' element of the original and the translation are in different places, Celan's original texts ends in 'Stehnn', while Felstiner's translation begins with 'stand', but this difference probably derives from the grammatical differences between German and English.

The third paragraph of the poem may show differences in its first line – while in German Celan writes 'Mit allem, was darin Raum hat', Felstiner translates this line into 'With all that has room within it'. However, Celan's original line may also mean 'With all for which there is enough room / space within'. Felstiner made a decision, but this decision is not unconditionally the best one and the meaning of the two lines in German and English, although they can meany approximately the same, they

can also be interpreted differently. It is not evident whether the German noun 'Raum' should be translated into its German etymological counterpart 'room', since it may rather mean 'space' in this context. Nevertheless, there may be no doubt about the fact that the lines 'auch ohne / Sprache' are well-translated into English with the expression 'even without / language'.

Similar to the previous poem compared in original and in translation, in the case of the present poem it can also be established that the translation has a strongly interpretative character, and the translator digressed from the original version at several places. The lack of a definite article, as seen above, may modify the whole atmosphere of a given poem in translation compared to the original text. That is why I think that it would rather be more exact to speak about 'adaptations / interpretations' instead of 'translations' in the case of the transliterated versions of Paul Celan's certain, mainly late and mature poems.

JOHN FELSTINER'S TRANSLATION:

THREADSUNS
over the grayblack wasteness.
A tree-
high thought
strikes the light-tone: there are
still songs to sing beyond
humankind.

THE ORIGINAL GERMAN POEM:

FADENSONNEN
über der grauschwarzen Ödnis.
Ein baum-
hoher Gadanke
greift sich den Lichtton: es sind

noch Lieder zu singen jenseits
der Menschen.

Fadensonnen – Threadsuns is one of the emblematic and well-known pieces of Celan's late poetry. The poem is not so hard to decode as several of Celan's late texts, since it seems to mirror the author's philosophy of art. The short piece consisting only a few lines is probably a vision about the *language beyond human language*, a system of representation that may be able to tell the untellable beyond the limits of human language and sing the 'songs beyond humankind'. However, this vision can also be interpreted in a negative way, since it is possible that in the world in which the songs are to be sung humankind exists no more – the question whether or not human beings are necessary for the existence of art and poetry may arise.

Analysing the translation and the original text, it can be observed that the beginning word of the poem is a neologism that probably means late autumn sunlight, but it is questionable in the case of Paul Celan's word creatures. The unusual neologisms in Celan's poetry may be treated as the elements of an independent, new poetic languages in which the words get rid of the limits of their traditional meanings. Felstiner's translation of Celan's neologism may be treated as precise, since the German word 'Faden' means 'thread' in English, although other interpretations are also possible.

It is also an interesting character of Felstiner's translation that the german compound adjective 'grauschwarz' is translated into English as 'grayblack', which is an exact translation, but it may also be considered that the German adjective grau – gray has a common stem with the noun 'Grauen' – 'horror'. Certainly, this semantic fact cannot be translated into English, but something is necessarily lost in translation. The compound adjective 'baumhohe' ('baumhoch' in an undeclined form) is translated into English as 'tree-high', and Felstiner even preserves the poetic hyphenation of the word in his own text.

Another difference between the original and the translated version of the poem can be that while in the original version Celan uses the verb 'greift sic' that approximately means 'grasp something', in Felstiner translation we can read that the tree-high thought 'strikes' the light-tone, and this verb creates a much stronger poetic imagery than Celan's original verb use. In this sense, Felstiner's translation is rather interpretative, creating the text's own reading in English. Furthermore, the last word of Celan's original poem is only 'Menschen' that means only 'men, humans', while Felstiner translates it into 'humankind', which gives a much more solemnly connotation to the English version of the poem, digressing from the athmosphere of the original.

It may be established that the English translation of one of Paul Celan's classic poems by John Felstiner strongly *interprets* the original one, creating its own poetic world in English; therefore, reading the English counterpart of *Fadensonnen* demands the analyst to consider the fact that not each translated text can be treated as identical with the original one, mainly when it is spoken about poetry translation.

JOHN FELSTINER'S TRANSLATION:

WORLD TO BE STUTTERED AFTER,
in which I'll have been
a guest, a name
sweated down from the wall
where a wound licks up high.

THE ORIGINAL GERMAN POEM:

DIE NACHZUTOTTERNDE WELT,
bei der ich zu Gast
gewesen sein werde, ein Name
herabgeschwitzt von der Mauer,
an der eine Wunde hochleckt.

The above cited poem was published in the volume *Schneepart – Snow-part* in 1971, one year after the author's death. It is also a poem that mirrors poetic and epistemological problems. The poetic speaker claims himself to be only the guest of the world, identifying the world (or himself?) with a name that is sweated down from the wall. The hermetic, visionary world of the poem may even be terrific – the world is to be 'stuttered after'; i. e., no knowledge can be conceived, communicated by human language. The limits of human language and the wish to create a new poetic language is one of the main topics of the celanian poetry – the present, fairly well-known poem may reperesent the same approach to language.

Comparing the original text of the poem and its version translated into English it can be seen that the strange tense structure, the Future Perfect in German, 'bei der ich zu Gast gewesen werde' is preserved in the translation – Felstiner writes 'by which I'll have been a guest', suggesting that the poetic speaker *will have been* a guest in some point of the future; i. e., the unusual temporal dimension of the poem is not lost in translation. However, what is a compound participle in German – 'nachzutotternde' cannot be translated into English with a similar compound, only with the expression 'to be stuttered after'. This solution, on the other hand, means that the unusual composition of words that is one of the main characteristics of Paul Celan's poetry is lost in this case of translation, the translation adds and takes certain elements, but this untranslatability of the compound structure derives from the differences between English and German. If we have a glance at the German compound 'herabgeschwitzt' which really means 'sweated down from somewhere' in English, we may see that it is not translated into English with another compound either. However, Felstiner maybe could have translated the compound into English as 'downsweated' which would certainly sound strange, but since Paul Celan is a master of the creation of strange, unnatural poetic compounds, it might even be preserved in English – i. e., what

sounds strange in German should also sound strange and unnatural in the English translation, although it is merely a supposition.

Concluding Remarks

Hungarian literary historian Mihály Szegedy-Maszák examines the issue of untranslatability and the chance of traslateability in a general aspect (Szegedy-Maszák 2008: 235-248). It may seem evident that in case of translation the issue of the differences between languages and the question of temporality arise; that is, the phenomenon of untranslatability must exist to some degree, as it is impossible to create completely form- and / or content-faithful translations. Certainly, reading the English translations of Paul Celan's certain poems it becomes evident that as it is mentioned by Imre Madarász that in parallel with untranslatability, translatability also exists to some degree, rather it is worth dealing with the question how much the translation of a given text is able to represent the atmosphere and references of the original text (Madarász 2005: 86–88). As it seems to be justified by the translations above, the translation of a given artwork in the target language is an independent literary entity, and the parallel translations of the same source text may not be considered identical to each other either. Perhaps it is not an overstatement that there can be as many Paul Celan as translators within the literature of a given language into which certain works of the author were translated – all translations speak differently, mediating certain elements of the original poem in a different proportion being a reading in itself, and it may depend on the attitude of the analyst which translation he or she chooses or whether he or she draws back to the original text of the poem avoiding the translations. Certainly, it has to be done if a given work to be analysed has not yet been translated into the native language of the analyst, but if a text was already translated into a certain language, in my opinion, the translated text should not be avoided and ignored by the analyst, since it is an already existing

reading of the source text that is part of the literature belonging to the target language. I do not think that it would unconditionally mean a problem in interpretation if a given text exists in translation, even if in several different translations, since a translation may add more aspects to the analysis of the same work. Although meaning may really be enclosed in language, and Celan's complex, self-reflexive, hermetic poems evidently mean challenge to literary translators, their translation, if not even completely faithfully, but is possible and is able to contribute to the success of understanding them.

Although as if some scholarly literatures in Hungary and elsewhere had mystified the issue of the translatability of the celanian poetry, it seems that the hermetism, obscurity and self-reflexive quality, at least in the majority of the cases, can be transliterated from the source language into several target languages including English. However, when analysing a poem by Celan in translation it cannot be forgotten that the given text is a *translation / interpretation*; i. e., it is worth knowing and examining the original German version of the given poem, buti t does not evidently mean that the translated quality of a given text leads to incorrect interpretations. In my opinion, on the contrary, the translated and the original version of a given poem may even complete each other, adding extra aspects to the analysis and interpretation. The celanian poetry and its transliteration in any language require specially sensitive reading, but the original poem and the translated version do not unconditionally disturb each other's interpretation, they rather add something to each other, supporting each other's textual structures. A *good translation* (I use this term very carefully, since it is a very subjective judgement which translation of which poem is 'good' and how) may be able to legitimise a foreign text within the culture and literature of the target language, and even a higher, more complete interpretation may evolve from the interaction of the translated and the original text. In my opinion, John Felstiner's interpretative English translations of Paul Celan's

poetry evidently added something to Celan's Anglo-Saxon reception, supporting the fact that on the one hand, all texts of the world literature are translatable to some degree; on the other hand, Celan's textual universe, since it does not always intend to be unambiguous even in its original German language, via the translations richer, deeper, more complete interpretations can evolve than only in German. All national literatures into which he was translated can have *their own Paul Celan* that makes the segments of unusual and richly whirling poetic world sound from different points of view, not falsifying the original version for the readers.

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"Message in the Bottle"

Paul Celan's Speech 'The Meridian' as a Manifest of Art and Poetry Theory

Paul Celan's well-known speech 'The Meridian' can be interpreted as a manifest of a complete theory of art. If we depart from the text itself and less from the critical reception, then we may state that poetry, the production of beauty via language, according to Paul Celan, is evidently a lonely and bitter, excruciating activity.

Celan, although he does it in a little obscure and esoteric way, evidently separates the categories of poetry and art from each other. As if poetry, this way of language use of exceptional power took place at a much higher level, as the embodiment of (an idea of) beauty standing in itself, cleaned up from any external factor, outside any system of reference.

For Paul Celan beauty, in the aesthetical sense of the word can be – and here we should think of something similar to words spoken by God, some type of sacralised poetic speech – what is free of every kind of ornament or external reference, and authentic beauty is created in this completely naked state of existence. It is enough if we think of Celan's poem entitled 'Stehen' – 'To stand'. Celan in his speech 'The Meridian' makes an attempt to destruct the hierarchical systems of reference (first and foremost, those of artistic and aesthetical nature), or at least to ignore and / or by-pass them.

As for the idea of beauty circumscribed in the speech, it seems certain that the text can be connected to Martin Heidegger's paradigmatic essay 'The Origin of the Artwork', even because, as testified by mere philological facts, Celan might have read this work already in 1953, together with the other items of Heidegger's collection of essays 'Off the Beaten Track'

(Holzwge). According to Heidegger, authentic artistic beauty is created without artificial human factors, without the dominion of technology over art. The result of this creation process is not some static, unmoving content of beauty and truth in the artwork, but it is rather 'event-like' (Ereignis), close to the ancient Greek philosophical conception of 'aletheia'. Aletheia does not mean some factual truth, it is not an answer to a question to be decided that can imply the dichotomy of true or false. It is not a static fact whose content of truth can simply be checked in the external reality, it is rather an event, truth taking place via which something that earlier was concealed becomes visible to us. Under no circumstances is this content of truth related to the scientific sense of the word, since the truth of art and the artwork helps man to become more in some sense than earlier, reaching a higher level of existence. This type of truth shows itself, opens up via the artwork – for example, via a poem, the artistic use of language – and reaches the receiver.

Heidegger evidently had a powerful impact on Celan's thinking, as testified by the text of *'The Meridian'*. The speech can be read as an implicit conversation with the philosopher. For example, Celan conceives objections against technology and the technicalisation of human society, and these notions can be related to another of Heidegger's paradigmatic essays entitled 'Die Frage nach der Technik' ('The Question Concerning Technology') that was evidently read by Celan, true, only after the composition of 'The Meridian', around 1968 (K. Lyon 2006).

If we read Celan's text cautiously, then we can see that he speaks about 'automatons' at several loci, in a very negative voice (and at the same time, referring to Georg Büchner's work, since 'The Meridian' was written on the occasion of receiving the Georg Büchner Prize):

"Please note, ladies and gentlemen: 'One would like to be a Medusa's head' to … seize the natural as the natural by means of art!

One would like to, by the way, not: I would.

This means going beyond what is human, stepping into a realm which is turned toward the human, but uncanny – the realm where the monkey, the automatons and with them … oh, art, too, seem to be at home." (Celan 2003: 42–43)

* * *

"The man whose eyes and mind are occupied with art – I am still with Lenz – forgets about himself. Art makes for distance from the I. Art requires that we travel a certain space in a certain direction, on a certain road.

And poetry? Poetry which, of course, must go to the way of art? Here this would actually mean the road to Medusa's head and the automaton!" (Celan 2003: 44)

Celan imagines authentic art as being independent of technology. Perhaps he also refers to the neo-avantgarde trends of arts spreading in the 1960s (here we may mention Walter Benjamin's prominent essay about the degradation of art to consumption and the reproducibility of the artwork) (Benjamin: 2006), together with Heidegger's concepts of existential philosophy 'Technikpessimismus' (technological pessimism) and 'Machenschaft' (the wish to dominate the world via technology) (Heidegger 2006). That is, the artwork, mainly the artwork existing in / via language should be free / independent of technology that depraves the human being, the 'Dasein' and alienates him or her from 'Being'. Based on it, Celan sees the essence of the truth and beauty of the linguistic artwork in its uniqueness and irreproducibility.

For Paul Celan, poetry (Dichtung) is not only the art of placing words beside each other, that is why art (Kunst) is used in *'The Meridian'* in a very restrictive (and sometimes negative, bound to social systems of reference?) sense. Returning to Heidegger's and Celan's intellectual relationship, although

Heidegger himself never strictly separated the notions of *Dichtung* and *Kunst* in his writings, in his post-war essays he seemingly tries to define the artwork as an entity outside the artificial frameworks of human society. According to him, it is also a realistic danger that moderns society may deprave language itself – considering Celan's well-known concept of language, mainly of his mother tongue German violated and abused by the horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the poet is seemingly afraid of the same, or he even considers this thought as a fact that already came true.

In contrast to Celan's negative opinion about modern(ist) poetry (despite the fact that literary history thinking in epochs considers him as one of the last poets of the paradigm of late modernity), there is a conception according to which 'real' (meaning free of artificial elements) poetry is similar to the concept of the absolute poem conceived by Mallarmé, also mentioned by Gottfried Benn in his ars poetical essay 'Problems of the Lyric' ('Probleme der Lyrik') written in 1951 (Benn: 2011). Implicitly debating with Benn, Celan conceives his aversions in 'The Meridian' against the neo-avantgarde trends of literature like concrete and experimental poetry which, according to him, seem to be too artificial:

"Ladies and gentlemen, what I am actually talking about when I speak from this position, in this direction, with these words about the poem, no, about THE poem?

I am talking about a poem which does not exist!

The absolute poem – it, certainly does not, cannot exist.

But every real poem, even the least ambitious, there is this ineluctable question, this exorbitant claim." (Celan 2006: 51)

In Georg Büchner's drama referred to by Celan *Danton's Death* the exclamation 'Long live the king!' is pronounced after the king's death. This absurd verbal manifestation is, according to Heidegger's philosophical terminology, a 'counter-word'

(Gegenwort), which is not else but an action deriving from man's instinctive desire for freedom. It cannot be excluded that in this certain counter-word Celan also sees the possibility of the realisation of politically motivated poetry – although he himself did not write so many poems of explicit political content, but he produced text that allow political interpretation, for example his poem beginning with the line 'In Eins'.

For Celan, Counter-word is the manifestation of 'real' poetry, a manifestation of language that is clear, free of interests and true – that is, beautiful in aesthetic sense of the word, a type of language use that is free of the distorting, rhetorical and artificial characters of language. Celan's 'The Meridian' contains even more radical and provocative elements than Heidegger's philosophy of destruction, intending to re-evaluate the whole history of human thinking. His concept can be related to the pair of notions 'Rede' (speech) and 'Ge-rede' (babble) from among which 'Rede' may also refer to the clear, pure (poetic?) way of language us, while 'Ge-rede' can serve in order to deceive the other and conceal the truth (K. Lyon: 126).

In contrast to Heidegger, Celan accentuates in 'The Meridian' that it is the poem itself that speaks and states itself, not the person of the poet. Although Heidegger states it at several loci in his writings that it is not else but the subject language itself that speaks vie human beings, according to Celan, the poem is an artwork bound to a certain time and place – referring to Georg Büchner's short story 'Lenz'. Büchner's Lenz lives in an enclosed, very narrow state of existence, in a type of exile, and he always speaks out of this state. This experience of being locked up, being exiled entitles him to pronounce the truth. The poem exists thrown into, locked within the dimensions of time and space in the same way, being defenceless, and this defencelessness can encourage it to pronounce contents that may not be pronounced via other forms of utterance of language.

Despite the similarities, we may state that Celan's 'The Meridian' conceives a theory of lyric poetry, and more generally,

a theory of art that is very different from Heidegger's and Gottfried Benn's. Poetry, as both Heidegger and Benn states, basically has a monological nature. Nevertheless, according to Celan, the poem exists in a state similar to the monologue only at a certain level of its creation process.

Although Heidegger writes about 'answers given to utterances' (Entsprechen) at several loci, Celan seems to interpret it in a different way. According to 'The Meridian' the poem becomes 'present' (Präsens), as if it, as a product of language, became also personalised, individualised, giving some answer itself. The poem is 'pre-sent' in the present tense, in the temporal dimension of a certain moment of time, but it speaks out of the present (K. Lyon: 131).

As Celan states, the poem is 'lonely and underway', as he conceives it, being 'en route', and it is also possible that Celan adjusted Heidegger's thoughts to his own thinking, even if he did not misinterpret the philosopher's complex system of thinking. The poem is not else but 'a message in a bottle' tossed in the ocean, sent to an unknown addressee – as Celan borrows this notion from Osip Mandelstam –, and it either reaches the potential addressee / receiver or not. However, Celan does not only suppose some encounter, but also dialogue, conversation with 'the Other', based on reciprocity, realised via the poem. Although the poem exists in a lonely state, it is not to be forgotten that it is permanently 'en route', moving towards someone (the receiver?), and this movement, this dynamism is much less accentuated in Heidegger's writings on language.

That is, Celan evidently refuses the monological nature of language / pronounced words / poems, since the poem, as mentioned above, always has a (potential) addressee and a destination. The poem is not else but a performative type of language use that also has an aesthetical function – if it reaches the undefined addressee, the Other, and it is not only words shouted into nothingness, it becomes an artwork of language. For

Celan, poetry is the path of voice in the direction of the "you", a metaphorical meridian connecting two – or more – subjects.

Art is not else but homage to absurdity, a dissonant secession from the monotonous context of weekdays, but at least an attempt to get out of this context. Art is the phenomenon that distances man from his own self, placing him in the context of the unknown, the terrific, the Uncanny (Unheimliche). As if artistic beauty, in Celan's interpretation, existed in symbiosis, or at least in a complementary relationship with horror. With the horror that we, human beings are forced to control in some way. The horror (Entsetzen) and silence (Verschweigen) also mutually suppose each other's existence, since the poem carries so ponderous contents that are nearly impossible to pronounce – it implies that Celan's late poems written in the period around the composition of 'The Meridian' also show a powerful tendency towards the poetics of silence:

"It is true, the poem, the poem today, shows – and this has only indirectly to do with the difficulties of vocabulary, the faster flow of syntax or a more awakened sense of ellipsis, none of which we should underrate – the poem clearly shows a strong tendency towards silence.

The poem hold its ground, fir you will permit me yet another extreme formulation, the poem holds its ground on its own margin. In order to endure, it constantly calls and pulls itself back from an 'already-no-more' into a 'still-here'." (Celan 2006: 49)

Conceiving the aesthetics of dialogue, according to 'The Meridian' poetry means 'Atemwende', breath-turn, as also referred to by the title of one of the late volumes of poetry by the author. It is the return to a primordial, natural state of existence that existed before art, and in a certain sense it is free of every kind of art, since in Celan's interpretation, art is a constructed,

artificial formation, and poetry of artificial nature only deceives us and conceals the truth:

"Poetry is perhaps this: an Atemwnende, a turning of your breath. Who knows, perhaps poetry goes its way – a way of art – for the sake of just such a turn? And since the strange, the abyss and the Medusa's head, the abyss and the automaton, all seem to le in the same direction – it is perhaps this turn, this Atemwende, which can sort out the strange from the strange? It is perhaps here, in this one brief moment, that Medusa's head shrivels and the automatons run down? Perhaps, along with the I, estranged and freed here, in this manner, some other thing is also set free?" (Celan 2006: 47)

Perhaps the poem is created from the recognition of some danger (Bacsó 1996: 71–83). From the danger that prevents the lonely artwork that is thrown into the ocean like a message in the bottle from reaching the addressee / the Other, from fulfilling its aesthetical function, from initiating a dialogue. The poem undertakes an endangered mode of existence (Bacsó 1996: 81), even risking to be thrown out of time and space, but at the same time, it finally becomes free. Celan asks the question whether or not the task of the linguistic artwork is to enlarge, to expand the frameworks of art?

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have come to the end – I have come back to the beginning.
Elargissez l'art! This problem confronts us with its old and new uncanniness. I took it to Büchner, and think I found it in his work.

I even had an answer ready, I wanted to encounter, to contradict, with a word against the grain, like Lucile's.

Enlarge art?

No. On the contrary, take art with you into your innermost narrowness. And set yourself free. I have taken this route, even today, with you. It has been a circle." (Celan 2006: 51–52)

As 'The Meridian' suggests it, we can speak about much more. The goal is rather to create a (poetic) space that is so narrow that implies horror and fear, and within which there is no place for circumlocution.

As for the notion of the author, reading 'The Meridian' in its textual reality, less based on the critical reception, we can see that Celan has a very specific concept about the role of the author – although he personifies and individualises the poem, he also claims that the poem is the travelling companion of the poet.

The poem is an entity bound to a given date, and as an utterance it speaks for itself, but it is also able to speak for someone else – interestingly, Celan perhaps does not even question the validity of poetry representing others:

"Perhaps we can say that every poem is marked by its own '20th of January'? Perhaps the newness of poems written today is that they try most plainly to be mindful of this kind of date?

But do we not all write from and towards some such date? What else could we claim as our origin?

But the poem speaks. It is mindful of its dates, but it speaks. True, it speaks on its own, its very own behalf.

But I think – and this will hardly surprise use – that the poem has always hoped, for this very reason, to speak also on behalf of the strange – no, I can no longer use this word – on behalf of the other, who knows, perhaps of altogether other." (Celan 2006: 47–48)

The poem that is beautiful in the aesthetical sense of the word, the poem that carries and / or generates aesthetical beauty holds its ground somewhere on its own margin, and shows a strong tendency towards silence – it pronounces only as much as unconditionally necessary. At the same time, the poem behaves as the extension of its author (perhaps similar to the Dasein in Heideggerian sense?), and it is evidently searching for the chance of encounter.

The poem is searching for the Other like a person, an individual, and in the sense of the aesthetics of dialogue it makes the receiver to turn to the Other; that is, to initiate a dialogue, a conversation. The poem becomes the property of the receiver, the receiver's own, and evidently makes him or her think it further:

"The poem becomes – under what conditions – the poem of a person who still perceives, still turns towards phenomena, addressing and questioning them. The poem becomes conversation – often desperate conversation.

Only the space of this conversation can establish what is addressed, can gather into a 'you' around the naming and speaking I. But this 'you', come about by dint of being named and addressed, brings its otherness into the present. Even in the here and now of the poem – and the poem has only one, unique, momentary present – even in this immediacy and nearness, the otherness gives voice to what is most its own: its time.

Whenever we speak with things in this way we also dwell on the question of their where-from and where-to, an 'open' question 'without resolution', a question which points towards open, empty, free spaces – we have ventured far out.

The poem also searches for this place." (Celan 2006: 50)

Celan's statement according to which there is no absolute poem has a paradoxical nature. The poet may rather conceive a kind of requirement, claim, expectation towards the poem that does not, cannot be completely met with.

The poet / reader who follows the poem as a travelling companion goes on by-passes, detours, and although he or she can also reach someone else, as Celan autobiographically refers to it in 'The Meridian', finally one gets closer to oneself, returning to oneself. 'The Meridian' is circular geographical formation that connects places that are very far from each other, but compassing the whole Earth it also returns to its own starting point. As we can read in the final paragraphs of 'The Meridian':

"I shall search for the region from which hail Reinhold Lenz and Karl Emil Franzos whom I have met on my way here and in Büchner's work. I am also, since I am again at my point of departure, searching for my own place of origin.

I am looking for all this with my imprecise, because nervous, finger on a map – a child's map, I must admit.

None of these places can be found. They do not exist. But I know where they ought to exists, especially now, and … I find something else.

Ladies and gentlemen, I find something which consoles me a bit for having walked this impossible road in your presence, this road of the impossible.

I find the connective which, like the poem, leads to encounters

I find something as immaterial as language, yet earthly, terrestrial, in the shape of a circle which, via both poles, rejoins itself and on the way serenely crosses even the tropics: I find … a meridian." (Celan 2006: 54–55)

If we make an attempt to read Celan's speech with the technique of close reading, by and large ignoring the constant references to Georg Büchner's works, we can see that it conceives essentially simple statements – it formulates the aesthetics of dialogue and the aesthetics of the return to ourselves and self-understanding, in some way following the thinking of the philosophers of the German hermeneutical school Wilhelm Dilthey and his 20th century successors Heidegger, and finally his disciple Hans-Georg Gadamer. It is not to be forgotten, as mentioned above, that among other possibilities of interpretation Celan's speech can be read as in implicit conversation with Heidegger. Furthermore, it is also a well-known philological fact that Gadamer wrote a whole booklet on Celan's poetry, finding the poem cycle 'Atemkristall' – 'Breath-crystal' to be the most appropriate example to apply his hermeneutical method of interpretation, also conceiving a dialogical aesthetics of poetry (Gadamer 1993). As we can read it in 'The Meridian':

"Is it on such paths that poems take us when we think of them? And are these paths only detours, detours from you to you? But they are, among how many others, the paths on which language becomes voice. They are encounters, paths from a voice to a listening You, natural paths, outlines for existence perhaps, for projecting ourselves into the search for ourselves … A kind of homecoming." (Celan 2006: 53)

Finally, it may be a risky, speculative statement, but Celan's 'The Meridian' perhaps does not only conceive the aesthetics of dialogue and self-understanding, an art theory very close to the German hermeneutical tradition, but, since this tendency is strongly present in Celan's poetic oeuvre, the text also seem to conceive the desire to by-pass media and mediality, the wish to reach immediacy, mainly in the linguistic sense of the term. Basically, the poem is not else but a medium, a vehicle of a message and a message at the same time, but in a certain moment of the encounter the receiver / addressee gets closer and / or returns to himself or herself. The poem and the receiver nearly become one, united, and the receiver is allowed, via the (personified?) linguistic artwork, to glance into a privative, enclosed reality within which the dichotomy of *mediatedness* and immediacy has already nearly no sense, since this reality exists enclosed in itself, at a certain level in an immediate way, but at least without multiple *mediatedness*. Certainly, this immediacy might only be an illusion – an illusion that the receiver can experience only during the (short) time of the encounter with the poem / the Other, and for a moment he or she can become part of some higher, less mediated, purer and more essential poem-reality / art-reality: the autonomous reality of the artwork.

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The Illusion of Immediacy

Medial Aspects of Paul Celan's Poetry

Introduction

In the present research paper I intend to examine one of the very important aspecst of Paul Celan's poetry – namely *mediality*, the problems of mediality and immediacy, highlighting how the problem of *mediatedness* by media and the impossibility of immediacy, and the fight against the medial nature of the world appear in several works by the poet.

Nowadays, we may speak about a number of types of media, that is why I think that it is worth examining poems that permit interpretations from the direction of mediality. First and foremost, perhaps it is worth investigating what Paul Celan could think about one of the most primordial media that were also considered an imperfect means of communication even in the age of the poet – a few words about language.

Language as Medium by Paul Celan

Paul Celan's view about language is very controversial, and it has a dual nature. On the one hand, the poet wished to demolish the limits of human language considered as an imperfect medium for communication; on the other hand, Celan's poetry permits an interpretation according to which he wanted to create a new poetic language that is beyond the human language used in everyday communication, even if not ceasing, but perhaps somehow reducing the *mediatedness* and mediality of the world. To illustrate this view of human language, one of the author's well-known, programme-like poems entitled *Sprachgitter – Speech-Grille* may serve as a good example, in which Celan makes an effort to cease the limits of human language:

JOHN FELSTINER'S ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

"***Speech-Grille***

Eyes round between the bars.

Flittering lid,
paddles upward,
breaks a glance free.
Iris, the swimmer, dreamless and drab:
Heaven, heartgray, must be near."

THE ORGINAL GERMAN POEM:

"***Sprachgitter***

Augenrund zwischen den Stäben.

Flimmertier Lid
rudert nach oben,
gibt einen Blick frei.

Iris, Schwimmerin, traumlos und trüb:
der Himmel, herzgrau, muß nah sein."

Metaphors – at least according to Celan's concept – increase the distance between two subjects; that is, they increase the *mediatedness* by language, and it may be the metaphorical nature of language because of which there can be no clear communication mediating messages over the everyday language. If we have a glance at the above cited lines, we may see that the poetic images lack the reference to something, which would be the gist of the traditional definition of metaphor. As it is mentioned by Celan himself, it was the above poem in which he tried to conceive that he was bored with the permanent hide-and-

seek game with metaphors. (Felstiner 1995: 106–107) Although the American monographer of the poet John Felstiner writes that at the time of writing *Speech-Grille*, in 1957 Celan did not yet completely cease the use of metaphors in his poems, but he did his best to divide them into an internal and an external reality. This way, symbolically, the *mediatedness* by language is not ceased, but it may be decreased, and words are perhaps able to speak to the reader in a more immediate way.

Celan's fight against metaphors may be read as an experiment of the clearance of the language and the decrease of the *mediatedness* by language to some degree (Mihálycsa 1999). In the poems written later than *Speech-Grille* the words do not function as metaphors, do not refer to anything, only *stand* alone, constituting poetic realities (Bartók 2009: 29). The wish to clear language from metaphors also appears in one of Celan's late, fairly known poem entitled *Ein Dröhnen – A rumbling*:

JOHN FELSTINER'S ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

A RUMBLING: it is
Truth itself
walked among
men,
amidst the
metaphor squall.

THE ORIGNAL GERMAN POEM:

EIN DRÖHNEN: es ist
die Wahrheit selbst
unter die Menschen
getreten,
mitten ins
Metapherngestöber.

That is, human language is not more for Celan than a *metaphor squall*, a chaotic medium lacking any sort of system. Some transcendent *Truth* walks down, among men amidst this chaotic squall of metaphors, and it may make us remember Nietzsche's theory about metaphors (Kiss 2003 : 112). According to Nietzsche – and it is no novelty for Linguistics – even linguistic commonplaces are metaphorical. Thinking after Celan, the language of our everyday life is an inadequate medium to mediate unambiguous information, because it is too medial and mediated. May there be *Truth* only if we conceive it in a language that is free of metaphors? The question evidently has no adequate answer, but based on Celan's above poem it may seem that a language cleared from metaphors could be able to express truths, and the cessation of *metaphoricalness* may decrease the multiple *mediatedness* and mediality of human pronunciations and experiences.

In some of Celan's poems, the poet perhaps tries to demolish, or at least by-pass the excessive *mediatedness* of human language by the method that certain poems are not written in one of the concrete national languages, but the poet borrowed words from different foreign languages – that is, it is hard to establish in which language the given poem speaks, unless we do not count the words of different languages on a statistical basis. The poem entitled *In Eins – In One*, or at least the beginning verses of the poem can be a good example to this tendency:

JOHN FELSTINER'S ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

"***In One***

Thirteenth February. In the heart's mouth an
awakaned shibboleth. With you,
Peuple
de Paris. *No pasarán."*

THE ORIGINAL GERMAN POEM:

„**IN EINS**

Dreizehnter Feber. Im Herzmund
erwachtes Schibboleth. Mit dir,
Peuple
de Paris. *No pasarán.*"

The above extract was originally written in German (the English translation of the German elements also tends to cease the borders between languages), but foreign expressions can be found in it nearly in the same proportion. The word *shibboleth* (originally meaning river, but in the Bible it was a secret tribal password used at border-crossing) is from Hebrew, the expression *Peuple de Paris* (people of Paris) is from French, while the expression *No pasarán* (they will not break through) is borrowed from Spanish. As for the poem, Derrida says that in the text a border-crossing takes place between different languages (Derrida 1994: 23–24). Although there is no doubt that the text of the above extract *is* a pronunciation in human languages, it is not easy to define in *which* language the poem speaks. The cessation of the medium of a concrete human language can also be interpreted as a poetic experiment to cease, or at least decrease mediality and *mediatedness*.

It may also seem that Celan's poetry treats the natural human language as a disaster (Lacoue-Labarthe 1996: 193–213). The poetic word wishes to demolish the limits constituted by the language of the everyday life, and necessarily, it wants to transgress these limits. The non-conventional words of Celan's poems and their new, surprising meanings also serve as the basis of this intention, since Celan ignores the earlier forms of poetic behaviour, and experiments to re-define the concept of *poeticness*.

There can also be a radical notion according to which poetry is not else but the cessation of language itself, and poetry *takes place* at the spot where language is already absent (Lacoue-Labarthe 1996: 199–200). This language certainly does not mean natural language, since if the poetic word is an autonomous entity, then poetry is not else but the liberations from limits. When the word *takes place*, that is, it is pronounced, the continuous speech is suspended, and the word as an autonomous entity rises above the system of the language, in a similar sense to Hölderlin's notion of *caesure* and *clear word* (Reines Wort). Celan's compound words created only in poetic constellations exist outside natural language; therefore, they may be treated as *clear words.* Poetry is constituted by the word that testifies human *being* and *presence.* This type of word is called by Celan *counter-word* (Gegenwort) in his speech called *Meridian*, after Georg Büchner's drama *Danton's Death* (Paul Celan 1996). Poetry's intention is to pronounce existence, mainly human being within it. The gist of the pronunciation of existence is that although poetry cannot reverse the tragedy of the imperfection of human language and man's scepticism about language, but at least it writes down and archives the tragedy of language (Lacoue-Labarthe 1996).

Despite the fact that language can be experienced as a tragedy, it may seem that written, mainly literary texts and poetry is trying to fight against the extreme mediality and language's tendency to distance subjects from each other. Language may lose its accentuated role and become one medium among many, and maybe it is language's main tragedy (Lőrincz 2003: 164). That is why I think that it is worth examining how written texts are represented in Celan's poetry as media.

Writing as Medium in Paul Celan's poetry

Writing and written texts, literary texts within them are recurring motifs in Paul Celan's poetry, and writing seems to appear a somewhat clearer medium than any other one.

Thinking with Gadamer, knowing Celan's cycle called *Atemkristall – Breath-crystal* the poem can be the medium of the encounter of "I" and "You" (Gadamer 1993). Although a poem is a medium consisting of language, the written text is evidently beyond the spoken language, since it is more imperishable – and at the same time, more material. This materiality, however, implies that a written text can place itself outside of its own historical existence, and a literary work may become a classical work (Gadamer 1984) that is historical, past and present at the same time – a material, that is, mediated entity, but at the same time existing outside the dimension of time, becoming immediate and in some sense transcendent.

Derrida highlights the primacy of the medium of writing and, despite the Saussurean paradigm, its original nature that may have been existed even before the appearance of language (Derrida 1991: 21–113). For Celan as a poet, writing is evidently a primary medium, several poems by author refer to it, and although he apparently does not believe in the exquisite capability of mediation of language, following Derrida's thoughts it is imaginable that poetry / poetic texts can function as media beyond the spoken language, as according to Derrida writing can express any message much more clearly than a spoken text.

Poetry is the possible medium of the expression of superior messages. The truth value of the these messages may remain undistorted, and beyond all of this we may think about non-linguistic, electronic and optical media, to which Celan's well-known poem entitled *Fadensonnen – Threadsuns* may refer (I will deal with it in detail later on).

One of Celan's late poems entitled *Das Wort Zur-Tiefe-Gehn – The word of in-depth-going* can also be interesting for us, since it contains strong references to the motif of writing:

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

THE WORD OF IN-DEPTH-GOING
that we have read.
The years, the words, since then.
We are still the same.

You know, the space is endless,
you know, you do not need to fly,
you know, what wrote itself in your eyes,
deepens the depths to us.

THE ORIGINAL GERMAN POEM:

DAS WORT VOM ZUR-TIEFE-GEHN
das wir gelesen haben.
Die Jahre, die Worte seither.
Wir sind es noch immer.

Weißt du, der Raum ist unendlich,
weißt du, du brauchst nicht zu fliegen,
weißt du, was sich in dein Aug schrieb,
vertieft uns die Tiefe.

In the closing lines of the poem something is *written*, writes itself to the poetic addressee, and this undefined entity *deepens the depths* (vertieft … die Tiefe); that is, it is able to open up deeper spheres of sense. Eye is the medium of sight – based on the last verse of the poem above, we may conclude that writing, written text is a phenomenon that *written in the eyes of someone* is able to mediate messages that may not be mediated by spoken language. The writing of the text into the eye is an important motif, because one decodes any text through one's eye. Writing, written texts are primarily optical media which we are able to decode based on our sight.

We may even risk the statement that human life is organised by linearity and continuity because of the continuity of phonetic writing systems (McLuhan 1962: 47). Starting from this thesis of McLuhan we may presume an opposition between verbal and written culture, just like between visual and acoustic media.

Certainly, it is worth mentioning that one of the monographers of McLuhan completely doubts that writing would be a primarily visual medium, since it can operate as a reflected sight if the reader, for example, reads foreign texts, and these times he or she comprehends the meaning of the text without decoding the form (Miller 1971: 10). The phonetic alphabet does not only separate the sight and the sound, but also separates each meaning from the phonemes signed by the letters, which results in meaningless letters referring to meaningless phonemes (McLuhan 1962).

Considering the same problem, we may cite George Steiner, according to whom the system of the phonetic alphabet and the printing that uses moveable letters based on it are not metaphysical inventions that are able to express transcendent messages – the reasons for their inventions is to be sought in the linear structures of the syntax of Indo-European languages (Steiner 1998: 253–257). However, this way writing would be degraded to a completely material level, while literature and literary texts may be able to express transcendent messages, even if the medium containing the message is physically tangible. As McLuhan states it, it is possible that writing makes texts uniform, but this uniformity concerns only the physical appearance, the medium of the work of art, but the artwork itself is able to remain unique.

Among others Walter J. Ong deals with the history and spread of printing and with the dominance of sight that in the history of humanity gradually replaced the dominance of hearing (Ong 1998: 245–269). Due to printing one has a different relation to texts already written by someone, since although handwritten texts counted as irreproducible, unique objects, in some cases artworks created by their author, printed texts are distanced from

their author, are uniform in some sense, and can be reproduced in an unlimited number. Speaking about lyric poetry this revolution can lead to the conclusion that certain literary texts are able to mediate their complete message only in a printed form – for example, let us just think of the typographic image poems by E. E. Cummings. Apart from handwritten texts, printed texts can be treated as finished works, since they cannot be written any further. As for Paul Celan's poetry, it may have importance in the case of the late, hermetic poems by the author – these short poems consisting only of a few lines or words in many cases are evidently finished texts, as for their printed form. In Celan's work even punctuation marks play an important role and may modify the opportunities of interpretation. Some poems, as Derrida emphasises, are even *dated*, and the appearance of the date in some editions below the printed poem may also accentuate their finished character (Derrida 1994: 3–74).

Gadamer emphasises that written, literary texts can have some specific truth value. According to the traditional definitions, a text is poetic if it lacks the factor justifying the truth value of the utterance (Gadamer 1994: 188–201). Literary / poetic texts can be adequately *heard* only by the so-called interior ear. However, when Gadamer speaks about the interpretation of an artwork, he metaphorises it as *reading*. All artworks in the world must be *read* so that they should become *present* in the Heideggerian sense. As for Paul Celan's poems, we may state that a poetic text always carries some message and has some truth value – even if in a negative way. In Celan's case, the message is perhaps pronounced by its *withdrawal*, its negative form of pronunciation. In the 20th century literature a new norm of truth appeared that belongs to the essence of poetry (Gadamer 1994: 200). Celan's poems tell the truth to the reader in a way that by their hermetism, hard interpretability and self-enclosed nature *withdraw* themselves from the reader and from the word. The truth is expressed in a negative form, seemingly withdrawing itself from the poem, not explicitly stating itself. Connected to

the metaphor according to which the whole understanding of the world is not else but *reading*, it may be worth having a glance at one of Celan's late poems entitled *Unlesbarkeit – Illegible*:

JOHN FELSTINER'S ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

ILLEGIBLE this
world. Everything doubled.

Staunch clocks
confirm the split hour,
hoarsely.

You, clamped in your depths,
climb out of yourself
for ever.

THE ORIGINAL GERMAN POEM:

UNLESBARKEIT dieser
Welt. Alles doppelt.

Die starken Uhren
geben der Spaltstunde recht,
heiser.

Du, in dein Tiefstes geklemmt,
entsteigst dir
für immer.

Based on this poem the *illegibility of the world* means that things, phenomena of the world in their complex relations cannot or can hardly be interpreted, understood in any way. The nature of all phenomena is *doubled*, on the one hand, they are visible and tangible, but there must be some hidden essence behind

everything – and this hidden essence, this *behind* is not reachable or tangible. The only way to *read* the world, says Celan poem, may be that the subject should *climb out of oneself*, alienates oneself from one's own identity. In the sate of this ecstasy one may experience the world in a more immediate, deeper way, at least in the world of Celan's poem. It is, certainly, only one of the possible interpretations of the poem above, and it can be acceptable only in a poetic context, since it contradicts the hermeneutical principle according to which no form of understanding is possible without mediation and mediality.

Perhaps it is an acceptable reading of the text that literature, the literary text is some kind of partaking in some experience that would otherwise finally deny us itself. The art of the past, due to mediality and material representation, may serve the needs of the men of the present (Stierle 1996: 286). Following Gadamer, it is possible only through media – one cannot step out of historical time, and one's existence in time has its end. Certain artworks can become permanent within time, becoming classic works, and – even if it is not an adequate statement within scientific frameworks – they may place themselves out of space and time, becoming eternal.

Literary text can be an eminent example of the phenomenon when something is not an answer to some question, but the representation of real things within imaginary frames. Lyric poetry may be the best example of the often debated relationship of artworks and media. Poetry can also be interpreted as the transgression between the schemas of literary genres (Stierle 1996: 270). A literary text through the written / printed material mediates much more towards the reader than just itself. The "You" appearing in lyric poems, the addressee of a given text can always refer to several subjects, can have an inter-subjective character. Considering Celan's late poems often referring to themselves, it can be an interpretation that not simply the poetic speaker speaks to the reader / addressee, but the text becomes the speaker itself, and this way, the degree of *mediatedness* between

speaker and addressee may be reduced. Even if the text of a poem is a phenomenon of language, something mediated by the medium of language, the artwork-character and literariness of the work fills the whole medium. After McLuhan's notion, in a poem the message and the medium may be able to become one, and speak to the addressee in a more immediate and less mediated manner, even if mediality cannot be completely ceased. However, it seems that poetry, and in the present case Celan's hermetic poetry makes an attempt to cease the mediated nature of reality.

Possible References to Optical and Electronic Media in Celan's Poetry in the Mirror of the Poem Fadensonnen – Threadsuns

As stated above, writing, written and printed texts can be treated as optical media, it is only a question of approach. Paul Celan's poems permit the interpretation according to which written texts may be considered as a kind of primary medium, at least for the poet, and written texts are able to mediate and archive information and meanings which are lost or incompletely mediated in spoken language.

One of the fairly well-known poems by Celan may refer among others to the technicalising culture and optical and electronic media of our present. This poem is called *Fadensonnen – Threadsuns.*

JOHN FELSTINER'S ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

THREADSUNS
over the grayblack wasteness.
A tree-
high thought
strikes the light-tone: there are
still songs to sing beyond
humankind.

THE ORIGINAL GERMAN POEM:

FADENSONNEN
über der grauschwarzen Ödnis.
Ein baum-
hoher Gedanke
greift sich den Lichtton: es sind
noch Lieder zu singen jenseits
der Menschen.

The above poem, similarly to other minimalist and hermetic poems by Celan, permits several possible interpretations, even if the number of possible readings is not endless. The text consisting of only seven lines turned the attention of literary scholars to itself a number of times during its history of reception.. We may presume that the text speaks about not more than the transcendent character of poetry, and the *songs to sing beyond humankind* refer to transcendent meanings that cannot be mediated by everyday language, only by art, namely poetry (Gadamer 1997: 112). In parallel the poem permits an ironic interpretation, according to which nothing more exists *beyond humankind*, reaching the transcendent in any way is impossible, and the poetic speaker is only thinking about it in an ironic manner (Kiss 2003: 175–177), and this way under no circumstances can we take the statement of the last line serious.

The phrase *beyond humankind* and the songs sung there / from there may refer to the transcendent, metaphysical world beyond the visible universe (either the world of platonic ideas or the underworld in the religious sense), but it is also possible that this *beyond* is to be understood in time, in an age from where *humankind* has already disappeared in the physical sense.

Is it possible that Celan's poem does not only refer to mystical, transcendent entities and meanings, but also to the quickly evolving technical media of the poet's own age? It cannot be decided whether this interpretations is legitimate or

arbitrary, but if we read Celan's poetry from the direction of mediality and *mediatedness*, it can evidently prove an interesting approach.

Examining the opening line of the poem the poetic text makes the reader *see threadsuns* (the sun's radiation through the clouds?) over a certain *grayblack wasteness*. A landscape is presented to the reader; that is, the poetic text is based on the sight, the imaginary sight created by the power of the words before the eyes of the reader. As we read the text further, we may *read a tree-high* human *thought* that *strikes* the *light-tone*, which is an acoustic and optical medium at the same time. Light-tone, as John Felstiner translates it, *Lichtton* in German is not Celan's neologism, but an existing technical term used in film-making; that is, the name of an optical medium.

The technique called *Lichtton*, namely *Lichttonverfahren* in German, translated in English as *sound-on-film* (apart from Felstiner's possible misunderstanding / poetic interpretation of the text) refers to one of the oldest film-making technologies. It implies a class of sound film processes where the sound accompanying picture is physically recorded onto photographic film, usually, but not always, the same strip of film carrying the picture, and this process did not count as a very new technology even in Celan's age, in the middle of the 20th century. As the poem suggests, the human thought is *recorded on film* – mediated by light, an optical medium, and sound, an acoustic medium at the same time. The dual usage of these media may also make us remember the more developed technical media of the present days, for example DVD-player, television or the multi-medial, virtual world of the internet. Is it possible that this *striking* of the *light-tone* is, as a matter of fact, equal to the *songs beyond humankind*? The mystery of the connection between the opening and the closing lines of the poem may be solved by this interpretation.

Medial cultural techniques and the incredibly quick development of electronic technical media in the 20th century

provided completely new types of experience to people, and in the modern age it also led to the radical change and re-formation of poetry (Ernő Kulcsár Szabó 2004: 166–178). Mechanical archiving systems and discourse networks were invented, discourses multiplied themselves, and it is not clear at all to whom messages – if we can still speak about messages at all – are addressed in the seemingly chaotic context of human culture that is mediated multiple times. Medial changes also caused changes in the field of literature, and Celan's poem which has been interpreted many times, may be considered as the imprint of these changes.

It is Friedrich Kittler who states that no sense is possible without some kind of physical carrier, medium; that is, our human world and culture are necessarily mediated and medial. However, the notion of noise introduced by Shannon nearly always enters the process of mediation, disturbing factors never can be excluded (Kittler 2005: 455–474). Poetry is maybe one of the clearest manifestations of language, a use of language that in principle should not be disturbed by any noise. The gist of poetry is that it creates its elements as self-referential elements, and it was the well-known model of communication by Jakobson that increased the distance between sign and noise as large as possible. Poetry is a medium, a form of communication that defends itself against disturbing factors called *noises.* If we consider the hermetic poetics of Celan's works and their wish to place themselves out of space and time, out of all networks that can be disturbed by noises, then it can be interpreted as a wish for a kind of immediacy.

Despite all of this, nowadays, numberless kinds of noise shadow the communication in our culture. Today noise can also be technically manipulated, and it is even used to mediate secret, encoded messages, as it can be observed in secret technologies of military communication (Kittler 2005). The relationship between noise and sign has been gradually blurred since it became possible to manipulate their relationship and since the

mathematically based communication systems became able to change the nature of noise. It may even lead to the conclusion that it is not certain at all that the addressee of certain messages can be called *man.* By and large it seems to be compatible with the possible interpretation of Celan's poem according to which the addressee of the songs that are sung *beyond humankind* we necessarily cannot call man / human.

The conquest of the electronic and optical media and the strong tendency of technicalisation in our society make it possible to conclude that we can gain knowledge about our own senses only via media. Art and technical media can serve the goal to deceive human senses. The technical media of our days, similarly to Celan's poetry and the above cited poems, create fictional worlds, illusion. Furthermore, in some cases this illusion may be so perfect that even the definition of *reality* becomes questionable (Kittler 2005: 7–40). These medium are first and foremost optical, and only secondly acoustic, since for the man of the present day the sight, the vision is becoming more and more primary.

Optical and electronic media, compared to the historical past, treat symbolic contents in a completely new manner. While the human body in its own materiality still belongs to the (physical) reality, media are more and more becoming the embodiment of the imaginary, the unreal existence and bring this unreality closer and closer to man. Paul Celan's above cited poem may also turn our attention to this tendency. Perhaps it is worth speaking about technicalistaion and the new types of media in a neutral manner, not judging them, but the extreme presence of technology in our society and the possible disappearance of *humankind* as such, the message, the songs *beyond humankind* in a temporal sense may be a fearsome thought. We are not to forget that the poem entitled *Fadensonnen* speaks about a *grayblack wasteness* (a landscape burnt to ashes?), a deserted waste land, in which we may see only a *thought striking the light-tone* – but no human being. Due to the extreme presence of technology in the (material) human culture,

certain phenomena can be liberated that cannot be dominated by man anymore. Celan's poem, and the possible negative utopia that it suggests can be read as a warning. Citing Georg Simmel, the tragedy of human culture (mainly in terms of mental values) is in the fact that after a while it may cease itself – man means the greatest danger to oneself, and not some external factor. (Simmel 1999: 75–93).

The Illusion of Immediacy

We may presume a tendency in Paul Celan's poetry according to which the poetic texts intend to cease, or at least decrease *mediatedness* and mediality, mainly the medium that has been proved to be imperfect for communication by these days: language. However, if art is not able to overcome the *mediatedness* by language, then it may experience to withdraw itself from all systems and laws of human world, creating its own reality. As it was mentioned above, art frequently mediates the world of the imaginary.

As if some of Celan's poems also tended to make art completely *privative*, ceasing or defying mediality and *mediatedness* by resigning from any type of mediation. Poems do not *mediate* anything more, only *stand* in themselves, beyond everyone and everything. This intention may be conceived in the late poem entitled *Stehen – To stand*.

JOHN FELSTINER'S ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

TO STAND, in the shadow
of a scar in the air.

Stand-for-no-one-and-nothing.
Unrecognized,
for you,
alone.

With all that has room within it,
even without
language.

THE ORIGINAL GERMAN POEM:

STEHEN im Schatten
des Wundenmals in der Luft.

Für-niemand-und-nichts-Stehn.
Unerkannt,
für dich
allein.

Mit allem, was darin Raum hat,
auch ohne
Sprache.

The poem places itself out of the dimension of time – it is also testified by the infinitive form of the first word of the text, lacking grammatical aspect or tense. This *standing* does not takes place sometime, even the *where* of the poem (*in the shadow of a scar in the air*) is questionable. We may not even state that it is some poetic speaker who *stands* – no more speaker, no more subject exists, it is merely the poem itself that withdraws itself from everywhere, into its own reality where nothing else exists beside it. This standing is also imaginable *even without language*, as the poem says – no more language, no more medium is necessary anymore, since nothing more is mediated. McLuhan's statement according to which all media contain another medium (McLuhan 1964) is suspended in this poetic context, since the poem refers to only itself without mediating any linguistic or non-linguistic message, placing itself out of technical media, meanings, or anything tangible. From outside the poem is not graspable anymore, and anything can be valid only in its enclosed

world. This way, the enclosed and seemingly unreachable world is able to create the illusion of immediacy, lacking any kind of mediation and mediality. Certainly, we can ask the question how understanding is possible if the poem speaks merely within its own reality, mediating, carrying no more meaning. This statement is evidently valid only within imaginary, artistic, poetic frameworks, and just for a certain time, since the reader, nevertheless, is *granted* something from the poetic world of the poem defining itself unreachable and free of mediation by reading and interpreting the text, at least receiving the splinters of this poetic reality, remaining at the level of intuition and suspicion, even if complete understanding does not seem possible anymore.

Essentially, the same idea of the cessation of mediality may be conceived in one of Celan's last poems entitled *Schreib dich nicht – Don't write yourself*:

JOHN FELSTINER'S ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

DON'T WRITE YOURSELF
in between worlds,

rise up against
multiple meanings,

trust the trail of tears
and learn to live.

THE ORGINAL GERMAN POEM:

SCHREIB DICH NICHT
zwischen die Welten,

komm auf gegen
der Bedeutungen Vielfalt,

vertrau der Tränenspur
und lerne leben.

In the above poem the metaphor of understanding the world as *reading* repeatedly appears – the poetic speaker / the poem itself calls itself on not *writing itself between worlds*; that is, is should not take the role of the medium or experiment to mediate anything between the different dimensions of existence, for example between man and man, subject and subject, since due to the *illegibility of the world* and the extreme *mediatedness* the exact mediation of meanings is maybe impossible. The tragedy of language – and of other media – is in the fact that after a while they tend to eliminate themselves. Human culture evidently needs media (Pfeiffer 2005: 11–49), and medium can even be the synonym for art in certain contexts. However, a question arises: what sense does it have to try to mediate anything, if nothing can be perfectly mediated? Certain pieces of Paul Celan's oeuvre lead to the conclusion that they give up the intention of any form of mediation. The poem *rises up against multiple meanings* and does not intend to mediate anything from the chaotic and dubious flow of meanings, departing to a lonely travel (Celan 1996) and reach a world where *mediatedness* and mediation is no more necessary. This world is concealed within the poem itself. The poem can only trust *the trail of tears* – the tears shed for the pain of the lack of immediacy and the multiple *mediatedness* of the world. The poem can *learn to live* only if it reaches the self-enclosed state of immediacy, standing for itself alone, where it is not exposed to language or any other technical medium. Certainly, this poetic withdrawal is only illusionary, yet for a moment, perhaps, we may feel as if the experience of immediacy became possible.

It may be an interesting observation that after the gloomy decades of the linguistic scepticism the desire for immediacy gradually recurs in the discourse of literature and literary studies of the present days (Kulcsár-Szabó 2003: 272–307), as it also

seems to appear in some of Paul Celan's late poems. Although we know well that our culture and all human experience are originally mediated, and mediality belongs to the essence of human existence, the immediate experience of phenomenon seems to be impossible, it is good to hope that somehow it is possible to bypass mediality. Art and poetry within it as a way of speaking clearer and perhaps more immediate than everyday language – as Celan's poetry intending to demolish linguistic limits – may grant us the hope that we can experience certain phenomena in an immediate way, accessing their substance.

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The Flood of Decay – Already so Close?

Essay on a Poem by István Géher

„... a víz a leggonoszabb ..."

micsoda beszéd? fél év – s már kiárad,
hömpölyget lombkoronát, tetemet,
mossa a partot, s ami rajta száradt,
beszívja magába, levet ereszt
a gát alá, lazítja, átszivárog
a réseken, kő kövön nem marad,
ha csábítják sustorgó vallomások,
ilyen vízen hajózni nem szabad.

eveznél? jó dolog, de csónakázás
asztaltól ágyig? örvénylik szobád.
elúszik minden, mert ez nem beázás,
ez árvíz, ennek nincsen ne-tovább...
folyjon tehát? az életeden átereszted?
ám pusztítson (ha kell): övé kurafi tested.

THE LITERAL TRANSLATION OF THE POEM INTO ENGLISH:

''…your water is a sore decayer...''

what speech is it? half a year – and it floods out,
drifting away leaves and carcasses,
eroding the river bank, it sucks in
what dried upon it [the bank],

seeps under the dam, undermining it, leaking through
the breaches, no stone remains upon another stone,
if it is tempted by whispering confessions,
it is forbidden to sail on such waters.

would you row? a good idea, but is it possible to
boat from the table to the bed? your room is whirling,
everything drifts away, it is not some little leak,
but it is a flood, it cannot be stopped…
so shall it flow? you let it run through your life?
let it destroy (if it is a must): now it possesses
your whoresome body.

The opening poem of the volume entitled "*Új Folyam*" [New River / Stream] by the contemporary Hungarian poet István Géher (1940–2012) written in 1998 was composed in a classical Shakespearean sonnet form – which is very characteristic of the author, mainly of his late works. The text consists of three units, of an eight-line, then of a four-line stanza, then of the two-line final unit, the so-called *coda*. These units are not only the metrical and strophic components of the poem, but they also constitute finely composed units of thoughts.

István Géher's poetic speaker starts speaking in a contemplative-meditative, subjective poetic voice, combining it with the figure of *self-apostrophe*, calling to himself, which is also very characteristic of his poetics. Although at first sight the text of the poem is not more than some kind of subjective poetic meditation, perhaps a little too philosophical contemplation about human existence *as such*, a text that does not need any much deeper or much more multi-layered interpretation, superficial readers can easily be disappointed. Namely, although the text consists of fairly simple lyrical "bricks", its message, if it has one at all, and the system of literary references and allusions concealed within it are much more complex, and we cannot close

the interpretation down with so few words… [Although the literal and rough English prose-translation of the Hungarian poem cannot really mirror or give back the strict metrical composition of the text, but it may mediate something from its message.]

The central poetic image and symbol of the poem, with noble simplicity, is *water*; that is, *flood*, the flood that drifts away and destroys everything, manifesting in a nearly apocalyptic extent. It is and absurd and surrealistic flood that reaches the poetic speaker in his very home, breaking in the most private places of his life: in his room, in his bed. As the poetic speaker who speaks using the first person singular declares it, calling to himself, together with not just a little self-irony, it is impossible to row or to boat in such a situation, since here the room is flooded by such water that drifts away everything; water which cannot be stopped, against which it is impossible and useless to defend ourselves. It is not some kind of tiny leaking, as the speaker ironically contemplates in the end of the second stanza. It is much more some incontrollable and unstoppable flood that is nearly identical with the Genesis flood narrative of the Bible that breaks in the room that symbolises the personal space of life of the speaker. The destroying flood does not mercy anyone or anything, and the room, and together with it a whole life disappears into nothingness amidst the whirling water, and the experience of decay, even if the poet himself is not forced to face it at once, comes very near to him…

If we make an attempt to interpret the text from the point of view of lyrical rhetoric, the figure of climax that can be observed in the three structural units of the poem that gradually consist of less and less lines due to the metrical characteristics of the Shakespearean sonnet is very spectacular. The first eight lines are the phase of conceiving the questions, of meditation, of the exact description the situation – the speaker is still fairly calm, but at the same time, he is also sceptical: "*micsoda beszéd? fél év – s már kiárad…*" – "*what speech is it? half a year – and it floods out*" – the alter ego of the poet within the poem asks the question,

and then he establishes with the same (certainly, only relative) tranquillity the fact that the flood washing and eroding the river bank will drift away everything. He knows it exactly that decay, death is dangerously near to him, but at the same time, he also distances himself from the threatening danger, and philosophising about the phenomenon he wisely states: "*ilyen vizen hajózni nem szabad*" – "*it is forbidden to sail on such waters*". But how could one avoid sailing upon the waters of life? Namely, the flood that is mentioned in this context is probably not only the water of death that drifts away and destroys everything, but also the water of life that flows into unknowable directions, since, as the ancient Latin proverb says, *navigare necesse est*, that is, *it is necessary to sail*, however dangerous waters we speak about… After the recognition follows the second phase that is encompassed only into four disciplined lines: here the poetic speaker can no longer distance himself from what necessarily has come very close to him. "*Evenznél?*" – "*Would you row?*" – he asks himself, trying to mock the situation, since poetic irony is also perhaps a way of survival. Certainly, it is impossible to row or to boat, since the flood is already flowing there within the room, drifting away everything, as it is also stated by the speaker, still with relative tranquillity, but realizing the closeness of the threatening phenomena: "*ez árvíz, ennek nincsen ne tovább…*" – "*it is a flood, it cannot be stopped…*". It is a stoic statement, but at the same time, it is also the brave recognition of the situation. Namely, it demands much bravery not to escape from something that directly threatens our existence, but to take notice of its closeness, or even to turn against it. This turn of István Géher's poem is some kind of stoical bravery, and this is the point where we step into the third phase in a lyrical rhetorical sense: the last two lines of the coda do not speak anymore in a stoic, but rather in a rhapsodic voice, concealing not little, but at the same time, not too much pathos either within itself. In the last two lines the lyrical subject asks himself a cardinal question, and perhaps this question is the most

important moment of the poem: "*folyjon tehát? az életeden átereszted?*" – "*so shall it flow? you let it run through your life?*", and with this question, he permits the destructive flood to flow through his life. The answer, even unspoken or half-spoken, is in fact "yes". The frail, "*whoresome body*" of man is evidently at the mercy of flood, of decay, either one wants it or not – the poetic speaker of István Géher's poem is able to accept this fact with dignity, but the dignified acceptance is, it seems, mixed with much defiance. The poetic subject has no other choice but give in to the flood that is much stronger than him – but it does not mean at all that, together with the acceptance of the unavoidability of the phenomenon, he does not make an attempt to resist destruction and decay, since sometimes the human instinct of survival can prove to be stronger than anything else. This strategy of climax and the controversial ending of the poem, the mixture of stoicism and resistance give exceptional power of lyrical rhetoric to the text.

If we make an attempt to read the text from the direction of the techniques of composition of poetic images, we can see that that the scale of poetic images enumerated in the poem is very traditional, and for the first sight it is perhaps less inventive. The flood is a literary topos, a well-known and frequently used poetic image – practically, it demands no deeper explanation. At a primary level, the image carries the very same meaning – it can be interpreted as the symbol of decay, of annihilation, and finally, as the symbol of death. However, the poem that seems to be very easy to read on the surface also has further deeper layers of meaning(s), and the system of images and symbols is much more complex than we would think it for the first sight. Although it is not very conspicuous, and István Géher's poetry is not so strongly characterised by the presence of intertextual references, the reader can easily pass over it, the poem is in fact not else but a paraphrase of Shakespeare, but at least it is in a very a strong intertextual, or namely in this case, in a hypertextual relation with

one of the best known works of the great English playwright and poet – *Hamlet*.

The genre, the metric form itself is also an allusion to the oeuvre of the great English writer without even referring to any concrete specific work by Shakespeare – as it was already mentioned above, we do not need to be very knowledgeable about metrics and strophic forms to establish that we are reading a Shakespearean sonnet. István Géher really liked this form that demands an immense degree of discipline. The Shakespearean sonnet encompasses the poetic message in very strict metrical frames, there is no place for poetic circumlocution, and the author of the above sonnet who was also a prominent literary scholar and researcher of Shakespeare's oeuvre knew it very well, as the text itself testifies it. The form itself alludes to the author from whom it borrowed its name even without involving the concrete works by Shakespeare in the space of interpretation. It is a kind of intertextuality generated by the mere metrical form, we could say. However, beyond the mere "*how*" of the pronunciation of the poetic message, in this case, the elements of meaning and content are much more interesting.

In Shakespeare's drama it is one of the gravediggers who pronounces the sentence that includes both the title and the closing sentence of the poem by István Géher: "…*your water is a sore decayer of your whoresome dead body*". The whole text of the poem refers back to this only one sentence as a hypertext, certainly, re-interpreting it to some degree, since water does not only appear as the "*decayer*", the enemy of the dead body, but also as the enemy of the still living body. The intertextual system of references of the text that is not so spectacular for the first reading is the most important point that also opens much deeper dimensions of lyrical rhetoric than the rather traditional image of the flood drifting away everything or the self-calling poetic voice that can also be considered a very traditional form of poetic speech. That is, if we examine the poem more carefully, due to the intertextual references to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the poetic

speaker of the poem written by the poet who was also a prominent Shakespeare-scholar, we are the witnesses of the transfiguration of both the poetic speaker and (to some degree) the biographical author himself into a Shakespearean hero within the internal world of the poem – and absurdly, here and now, in this moment locked in a poem, it is the (never-existing) *old Hamlet* who speaks to the reader, a literary hero who, with his stoic and meditative voice, has already resigned himself into the necessity and irreversibility of decay…

The self-apostrophe that is so characteristic of István Géher's poems is essentially not else, but the verdict of the poet on himself, a verdict which is not unconditionally more serious than the verdict above any human being, and the pronunciation of this verdict does not mean at all that the intention of resistance, the instinct of survival that can prove to be stronger than anything else is not there in the speaker at all. Namely, this instinct is even able to fight against time, this flood drifting away everything, the natural and necessary process of human aging and decay, even if it is necessarily impossible to overcome aging and death. Although within the world of the poem the destructive flood of decay is very close to the poetic speaker, it has not yet defeated him at all. The acceptance of the unchangeable facts does not mean giving up the fight immediately, here and now. It is the poem of the dignified acceptance of reality, but under no circumstances is it the poem of immediate, unconditional and undignified surrender to death…

As for the final message of the poetic text, taking it all round, it can seem to be very pessimistic. However, since we are reading a multi-layered poetic text, this is only one of the possible messages against which we can also conceive radically different interpretations. Finally, the personal, subjective and the universal perspectives fuse, and *the old Hamlet*, this strange, from a literary point of view, paradoxical, absurd and (self-)ironic figure turns the absurdity of his own (textual) existence against decay that once reaches everything and everyone. Although he does not

overcome or avoid decay, since no-one is able to do so, but perhaps temporarily he defies it. And those who gain time also gain life (perhaps also gaining some kind of eternal life through the eternity of literary texts?) – and this possible interpretation of the poem may immediately give us the reason for much more optimism than the reader would think it for the first reading…

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