ESTI KORNÉL AND THE BULGARIAN TRAIN CONDUCTOR

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Chapter nine of Dezső Kosztolányi's 1933 work, *Esti Kornél,* lends itself to multiple interpretations, none complete or exhaustive. It is possible to look at this story from the perspective of the other – the Bulgarian train conductor – and it is possible to analyze it as an allegorical, danteesque descent into an inferno in which the Bulgarian train conductor is a guide, a *kalauz*, to *Esti Kornél*. A look at the story from the perspective of narratology would yield rich results, as would a rhetorical approach. I propose an analysis of this story through the prism of translation. It reveals that this is a type prose very much akin to poetry: in it, linguistic form is at least as important as semantic content, if not more. Here, the recognition of formal patterns leads to semantic discoveries. In this chapter, language has become the protagonist that manipulates the other characters. Translation points most straightforwardly to this fact because it is in translation that the loss and, therefore, the presence of the original's linguistic form is most acutely felt. The problems raised in translation illustrate how this text poses critical questions about linguistic and cultural relativism, about the nature of translation, about the possibility of communication between different linguistic communities as well as between individuals who share linguistic and cultural values.

Keywords: metaphoric structure, allegory, narratology, translation, mistranslation, allusion, imagery, semantic multidimensionality, indeterminacy, irony

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> ...we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested—laid asleep—tranced—racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated; relation to things without abolished and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is, that when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds...
>
> (Thomas De Quincey, "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*")

Chapter nine of Dezső Kosztolányi's 1933 work *Esti Kornél* lends itself to multiple interpretations, none complete or exhaustive. One may look at this story from the perspective of the other[1] – the Bulgarian train conductor – and it is possible to analyze it as an allegorical, dante-esque descent into an inferno in which the Bulgarian train conductor is a guide, a *kalauz*, to *Esti Kornél.* A look at the story from the perspective of narratology would yield rich results, as would a rhetorical approach. Yet an analysis of this story through the prism of translation reveals that this is a type prose very much akin to poetry. Its linguistic form is at least as important, if not more, as its semantic content. Here, the recognition of formal patterns leads to semantic discoveries. Translation points most straightforwardly to this fact because it is in translation that the loss and, therefore, the presence of the original's linguistic form is most acutely felt. In this chapter language has become a protagonist, one who manipulates the other characters. The text raises critical questions about linguistic and cultural relativism, about the nature of translation, about the possibility of communication between different linguistic communities, as well as between individuals who share the same linguistic and cultural values.

I. Metaphoric Structure

In this ninth episode Esti Kornél tells the story of his journey through Bulgaria to Turkey. This is a rare experience, he explains, because it is not often that he travels through a country whose language he does not understand: Esti speaks ten

[1] For example, the 1999 issue of the Budapest Hungarian–Bulgarian periodical, *Haemus* contains a Bulgarian translation of this chapter as well as bilingual responses to it, some of which are re-writings of the chapter from the perspective of the train conductor: *Haemus. Bolgár–magyar társadalmi és kulturális folyóirat* VIII, 1999, 3.

languages but knows only three or four words of Bulgarian. At night, when all the other passengers around him are asleep, he encounters a train conductor and decides on the spot to convince him that he knows Bulgarian at least as well as a university professor from Sofia. They smoke and slowly the conductor warms up and begins to tell a story at the end of which he roars with laughter, pulls out a letter, the photograph of a dog, two large, green buttons made of bone, and waits for Esti's response. When Esti says yes and approves of the buttons, the stubby, black-mustached conductor begins to sob; when he says no, the conductor becomes angry. To save face, Esti returns to his compartment and falls into a deep sleep. He awakens at noon only to find the conductor waiting by him like a faithful dog. As he leaves the train, Esti's last word, "Yes" makes the conductor happy.

At the rhetorical level the text is rich in allusions and tropes, especially in a series of contrasting images of fire and ice, cold and heat, darkness and light, which create a metaphoric pattern. As in poetry, the metaphoric structure generates this text and not any cause-effect relationship between events in the plot. Travelling through a country whose language one does not understand is compared to being spiritually deaf, or to watching a silent film without music or subtitles. This silent film seems to come to life, and there is the sense that Esti, whose name is an adjective meaning "of the night," can only watch helplessly as the train carries him through the night at full throttle: "Vágtatott velem a gyors, ismeretlen hegyek és falvak között" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 6).[2] The land's beauty remains in the dark for Esti just as the conductor's story remains incomprehensible to him. If language is our world, then the land's darkness may be a symbol of Esti's finding himself outside of language. The meeting with the conductor happens just after midnight in a darkness punctured only by distant fires: "A táj szépségéből csak fekete packákat láttam. Eseménynek számított, ha fölvillant valahol egy tűzpont" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 6).[3]

The black-mustached *kalauz* appears carrying his lamp, his eyes sparkling, and they light up in a smokers' ritual. This is a significant starting point in their conversation. They not only light up their gold-tipped cigarettes but they burn together as their conversation kindles: "Mind a ketten égtünk, pöfékeltünk, orrunkon eregettük ki a füstöt" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 6).[4] Soon Esti breaks the ice for good with a "yes." "Most kérdő hangsúllyal, kissé értetlenül és csodálkozva érdeklődtem: Igen? Ez – hogy úgy fejezzem ki magam – végképp megtörte a jeget. A kalauz

[2] "The train carried me swiftly through unknown mountains and villages." All translations from Hungarian and Romanian are mine unless otherwise specified.

[3] "Out of the land's beauty I saw only black spots. It was a remarkable event if a point of fire blinked somewhere."

[4] "We were both burning up, puffing, blowing smoke through the nose."

fölengedett,[5] s beszélt, körülbelül egy negyed óráig beszélt, kedvesen, nyilván változatosan is, s nekem ezalatt nem kellett törnöm a fejem, hogy mit válaszoljak" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 8).[6] "Megtörte a jeget," broke the ice, and "törnöm a fejem," literally "break my head," create an interesting formal, not only semantic, symmetry through "törni," to break, smash, crush or crack.

In the next paragraph the conductor melts and words flow out of his mouth in torrents: "Ahogy a szavak *patakzottak* a szájából, ahogy *fecsegett-locsogott*, abból nyilvánvalóvá vált, hogy engem már álmában se tartana idegennek" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 8).[7] The etymology of both "fecskendez" (to squirt, spray, sprinkle) and "locsol" (to water, spray, sprinkle) relates "fecsegni-locsogni" (to chatter-to babble) to other water imagery in the text. This is exactly what Esti, in his desire to come across as a Bulgarian native but educated speaker, decides not to do at the beginning of the encounter: "Főképp nem *fecsegtem*" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 7).[8]

Furthermore, Esti is careful to feed the fire of this conversation from time to time: "időnként gondoskodnom kellett arról, hogy a társalgás tüzét tápláljam" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 8).[9] Like a real flame, his feigned attention, grows faint, is scattered and flares anew: "A figyelmet mímeltem, ellenben nem azt az erőlködő figyelmet, mely már eleve gyanús, hanem azt a figyelmet, mely hol lankad és szétszóródik, hol újra lobot vet és föllángol" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 9).[10] As words continue to stream out of the conductor's mouth, this fire becomes self-sustaining, and Esti no longer has to feed it: "Később nem volt szükség arra, hogy az ötletek ilyen aprófájával élesszem a társalgás vidáman pattogó tüzet. Anélkül is úgy lobogott az, mint valami máglya" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 9).[11] The conductor's narrative flows like a river and eventually attains epic proportions:

5 "Fölengedni" – to grow milder, yield, break, thaw, melt, defrost—appears in the Romanian translation as "se ambală:" "Conductorul se ambală și vorbi cam un sfert de oră" (128) – "the conductor became excited and spoke about a quarter of an hour." This is slang for getting ready, getting warmed up, becoming excited or interested; it literally means to rev the engine. It clearly misses the sense of melting or thawing caused, in the original, by the "yes" which broke the ice.

6 "Now, with a questioning emphasis, a little confused and surprised, I took interest: Yes? This – I would say – *broke the ice* for good. The conductor *melted* and spoke, he spoke about fifteen minutes, amiably, plainly and about great many things and, meanwhile, I didn't have to wreck my brains for an answer."

7 "As the words gushed out of his mouth, as he chitter-chattered, it became evident that he wouldn't even dream that I am a foreigner."

8 "I especially did not chit-chat."

9 "From time to time I would have to make sure to nourish the fire of our conversation."

10 "I mimed attention, but not that strained attention which is suspicious from the start, but that which grows faint and disperses only to flash its flames anew and flare up."

11 "Afterwards there was no need to feed the cheerfully crackling fire of our conversation with any firewood ideas. It was blazing anyway, like some kind of bonfire."

> Mondatainak üteméből mindenesetre kiéreztem, hogy egy kedélyes, vidám, hosszú lélegzetű és *összefüggő* történetet ad elő, mely széles, epikai mederben lassan és méltóságosan hömpölyög a kifejlet felé. Egyáltalán nem sietett. Én sem. Hagytam, hogy kitérjen, elkalandozzék s mint patak csobogjon, majd visszakanyarodjék és beleszakadjon az elbeszélés kivájt, kényelmes folyamágyába. (Kosztolányi, 2000, 9) (my italics)[12]

At the end of the conversation, there are signs of a cooling off. The train stops in a small village, and Esti leans his head out into the cool air as daybreak's peonys blossom : "Megfürdettem zúgó fejem a hűs levegőben. A hamuszürke égen a pitymallat bazsarózsái nyiladoztak" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 10).[13] The contrast of the night's darkness punctured by distant fires is reversed as red blossoms spot the ash-gray morning sky – sign that a transformation has occurred. When the conductor returns with the punch line, Esti gives the wrong answer and suddenly finds himself under fire: "A kérdések egyre gyorsabban és határozottabban kattogtak, mint a gépfegyverek, a mellemnek szögezve. Ezek elől nem lehetett kitérnem" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 12).[14] Esti smolders this fire with his coldness (hidegséggel) and retires into his compartment: "Kiegyenesedtem, metsző *hidegséggel* mértem végig a kalauzt..." (Kosztolányi, 2000, 12).[15] His strategy has backfired and he is caught in the trap he himself wanted to set: "Úgy látszott, hogy kelepcébe kerültem, s elhagyott jószerencsém. De megmentett fölényem. Kiegyenesedtem, metsző hidegséggel mértem végig a kalauzt, s mint aki méltóságán alulinak tartja, hogy ilyesmire válaszoljon, sarkon fordultam és nagy léptekkel fülkémbe távoztam" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 12).[16] Coldness settles in again, ending the cycle of heating up and melting and also of the torrent of speech and life itself.

12 "In any case, from the rhythm of his sentences I realized that he tells a jovial, merry and elaborate narrative broad in scope, which surges in its wide and epic riverbed towards the outcome, slowly and majestically. He wasn't in a hurry at all. Neither was I. I allowed him to expand and to digress as a stream splashes about, then to turn back and fall into the carved, comfortable riverbed of narration." The verb "előad" presents some translation difficulty as it has many, different semantic connotations: to produce, show, exhibit, cough up, expound, narrate, relate, describe, perform, act, tell.

13 "I bathed my buzzing head into the the cool air. On the ash-gray sky the daybreak's peonys blossomed slowly."

14 "The questions rattled uninterruptedly faster and more resolute, like a machine-gun aimed at my chest. I could no longer avoid them."

15 "I straightened up and stared down the conductor with a piercing coldness..."

16 "It appeared that I had fallen into a trap and my good luck had deserted me. But my audacity saved me. I straightened up and stared down the conductor with sharp coldness and, as someone who thinks it beneath his dignity to answer such a question, I turned on my heels and left for my compartment with a confident stride."

He falls suddenly asleep as if having died of a heart attack, "szívszélhűdés." As he awakens bathed in sunlight, Esti finds the conductor waiting by him like a faithful dog: "Déltájt forró verőfényben ébredtem ... A kalauz lépett be ... Csak állt-állt mellettem hűségesen, mint a kutya" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 12).[17] Esti's final word "yes" warms up the train conductor once again: "Ez a szó *varázserővel* hatott. A kalauz *megenyhült*, földerült, a régi lett" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 12–13).[18]

This last "yes" Esti leaves behind, ignorant of its meaning and effect, shows that in this story words have magical power and conversations carry enchanting possibilities. This is how Esti describes his conversation with the train conductor: "De a társalgást, melynek *igézetes* lehetősége már a levegőben lebegett közvetlenül a fejünk fölött, valahogy mégiscsak meg kellett indítanom" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 7).[19] Both the noun "varázserő" (magic power, charm) and the adjective "igézetes" (enchanting, bewitching) point to the powers language has over Esti despite his attempts to manipulate it. "Igézetes" is particularly interesting because it contains the noun "ige," which means "verb" but also "the Word," in the sense of *teremtő ige*, the creating word. Language not only enchants, it has the power to create. It controls the characters and has become the episode's protagonist.

It is difficult to say whether such imagery as discussed above is always consciously built into the text by the author. We can fairly assume, for example, that in the passage "Oly gyorsan *aludtam el*, mint aki szívszélhűdés következtében szörnyethal" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 12),[20] the poetic nature of the original Hungarian, rather than any author-narrator, has built into the verb "elaludni" the double meaning of to fall asleep and to be extinguished or fizzled out as a flame or an affair – "elaludt a lángja," "the flame has gone out." Esti does not simply fall asleep, he is "extinguished." It is not the author who uses the language. Rather, language speaks through the author. Analyzing this text through the prism of translation points to the central role language plays in this episode – and in Kosztolányi's prose in general.

17 "Around noon I awakened in blazing sunshine. ... The conductor entered. ... He just stood there beside me, faithfully, like a dog."

18 "This word had a magical effect. The conductor was appeased, lit up, reverted to his former self." It is difficult to find an English equivalent for the verb "megenyhül" – to grow milder, turn less cold, become friendlier.

19 "After all, the conversation whose enchanting possibility already hung in the air, directly above our heads, had to get going somehow."

20 "I fell asleep as quickly as if struck by a heart attack and killed on the spot."

II. What Is Lost In Translation

In 1987 Georgeta Delia Hajdu's Romanian translation of the *Esti Kornél* cycle was published in Bucharest by Editura Univers. The volume ends with a brief note in which Kosztolányi, whose novels reflect his sympathy for the world of the ordinary man,[21] is described as having saluted with enthusiasm the proletarian seizure power in 1919. It is also interesting to note that, although the chapters are numbered correctly and eighteen of them appear in the table of contents, the twelfth chapter is simply omitted from the translation. While this is also the most extensive chapter in the collection, one can understand why in 1987 in Romania it may have been considered too subversive to be included:

> L'absence du sens est encore plus déconcertante dans le chapitre le plus volumineux, tout au long duquel le président, le baron Wilhelm Eduard von Wüstenfeld, ne fait que dormir. Ici, l'absence d'intrigue est une source d'humour en même temps que la manifestation d'une attitude subversive.
>
> Le sommeil de Wilhelm Eduard von Wüstenfeld sert de prétexte à une parodie des séances scientifiques. (Szegedy-Maszák, 1988, 160)

In light of these visible signs of censorship it may be difficult to say why certain choices were made by the cycle's translator. However, the purpose of this analysis is not to explain these choices but to understand certain aspects of the original by looking at them through the prism of this otherwise very interesting translation.

After a first reading it is possible to say that the translation captures the ironic sophistry that characterizes many of Esti Kornél's arguments and remains faithful to the general meaning of the source text. For instance, Esti Kornél explains that, on the one hand, travelling through a country whose language he does not know is a spiritually numbing experience in which people are reduced to museum pieces and the traveler becomes spectator to a silent film without music and subtitles. On the other hand, he continues, this can also be an amusing experience, one that lends the traveler a certain amount of independence ("függetlenség") and irresponsibility ("felelőtlenség") and gives him an illustrious kind of solitude ("előkelő magány"). The translator transforms this sentence and the following one into true moments of merry-making: "Ce solitudine nobilă, dragii mei, ce independență și iresponsabilitate! Ne simțim dintr-o dată sugari, sub tutelă" (Kosztolányi, 1987,

[21] Literally, the novelist has sympathy for the world of "the little people." The original reads "romanele ... oglindesc simpatia pe care Kosztolányi o arată față de lumea oamenilor mărunți" (205).

125).[22] This humorous, ebullient spirit is maintained throughout the translation. Expressions such as "járni-kelni idegenben" ("to come and go, move through") or "jó pipa volt" (literally, "he was a good pipe") are translated a style that, in the context of Romanian literature, alludes to (sends to) characters and modes of speech that were satirized by the playwright I. L. Caragiale in his sketches and comedies. Although it is more difficult to translate than to criticize translation, this satirical, caragialesque spirit places this particular translation in a register very different from that of the original and effaces its more serious philosophical and linguistic concerns. Below are three examples illustrating this point.

The first is the translation of the beginning of the sentence: "Pokoli mulatság úgy járni-kelni idegenben, hogy a szájak lármája közönyösen hagy bennünket, s mi kukán meredünk mindenkire, aki megszólít (Kosztolányi, 2000, 5).[23] Georgeta Delia Hajdu translates it as follows: "E teribil de distractiv să te fîțîi de ici-colo printre străini și larma gurilor să te lase indiferent, și să te holbezi mutește la toți care ți se adresează" (Kosztolányi, 1987, 125).[24] At least one difference between the source and target text stands out clearly: the word "pokoli" (an adverb meaning hellish, infernal, of hell, frightful, fiendish) is substituted in the Romanian translation with "teribil" (terribly). The "hellish" nuance of this word may seem unimportant but losing it in translation means losing the sense that Esti's journey is not simply "terribly amusing" but also somewhat terrifying. After the train conductor delivers the punch line of his anecdote, Esti qualifies him straightforwardly: "Annyi szent, jó pipa volt, ördöngös egy fickó" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 10).[25] Hajdu does not miss the "devilish" meaning this time – "Ce să mai vorbim, era limpede că-i o poamă bună, un tip îndrăcit" (Kosztolányi, 1987, 10)[26] – but she does leave out the literal meaning of "szent" (saint), which in Hungarian contrasts ironically with "ördöngös" (devilish). It is difficult to say whether this shows a certain general carelessness to the original's subtleties – as when in the story's subtitle the word "bábeli," or Babelian, is translated as "babilonic," Babylonian – or whether the mistranslation of words which have religious connotations, "szent," "pokoli," "bábeli," is due to official- or self-censorship.

A second even more interesting example is an expression that occurs at the end of the fourth paragraph of the story, when Esti, just before encountering the train conductor, looks around and realizes he is the only one still awake in the train

22 "What noble solitude, my dears, what independence and irresponsibility! We feel suddenly like nurslings under tutelage."

23 "It is hellishly amusing to come and go in a foreign country unaffected by the din of the mouths to stare tongue-tied at everyone who addresses us."

24 "It is terribly amusing to fuss about here and there among strangers and to be left indifferent by the din of the mouths, and to stare dumbly at all who address you."

25 "By God, he was a good pipe, the chap was a devil."

26 More or less literally: "No use discussing it, he was a good fruit, a devil of a guy."

compartment: "Köröttem minden utas az igazak álmát aludta." Literally, this sentence may be translated as "around me every passenger slept the dream of the true." Georgeta Delia Hajdu chose to render this as "în jurul meu, călătorii dormeau, cu toții, somn adînc."[27] Obviously, "somn adînc," "deep sleep," does not have the same connotations as "az igazak álmát." The expression "somnul drepților," "the sleep of the just," does exist in Romanian and, as in Hungarian, it has a religious connotation referring both to the sleep of one who has no sins and a clear conscience, as well as to the sleep of death. Once again, by translating "az igazak álmát aludta" as "deep sleep," the implication that Esti Kornél may have a heavy conscience and may have embarked on an unusual journey is lost in translation. In the original, this implication is not unimportant and is reinforced by the story's figurative language and narrative structure.

The third example is the translation of the noun "kalauz" – a word which features prominently in the source text. It appears from the very beginning in its subtitle: "Melyben a bolgár kalauzzal cseveg bolgárul, s a bábeli nyelvzavar édes rémületét élvezi" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 5).[28] The Romanian translation of the subtitle is strikingly close to the original,[29] with the exception[30] of the word "kalauz," which is translated into Romanian as "conductor," or train conductor. There is nothing wrong with this rendering except for the fact that an entire layer of meaning associated with the word "kalauz" is lost.

The mistranslation does not take place for lack of a Romanian equivalent. Such an equivalent exists – "călăuză" – and shares a common etymology with its Hungarian counterpart. *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii Române* [The Explicative Dictionary of Romanian Language] defines "călăuză" as a person who accompanies in order to show the way, give the necessary indications or explanations; guide; person who guides ("îndrumează") in an action, in a field of research, etc.; a user's manual or guide book. The *Magyar Nyelvtörténeti Szótár* [The Dictionary of the History of the Hungarian Language] cites the use of the word in various works and periods of time beginning with 1380 when "Kalawz" was used in a chancellory's document. At this time, the word already had the sense of one who guides through an unknown place, a leader ("ismeretlen helyen átvezető, utat mutató személyé; Wegweiser, Fürer"). Also worthy of note are the following uses: in

27 "Around me the travellers were all sleeping a deep sleep."

28 I translated "nyelvzavar" as "language-confusion" although "zavar" means to disturb, trouble, inconvenience, bother: "in which he [Esti Kornél] makes small talk with the Bulgarian train conductor and relishes the sweet terror of the babelian language confusion."

29 "În care Esti Kornél face conversație – în bulgărește – cu conductorul bulgar și savurează dulcea spaimă creată de babilonica încurcătură de limbi." "In which Esti Kornél makes conversation – in Bulgarian – with the Bulgarian train conductor and savors the sweet terror created by the babylonian language entanglement."

30 Excepting also the substitution of Babel with Babylon.

1613 the word was used with the sense of instruction book as in Pázmány Péter's *Isteni igazságra vezerlő Kalauz* [Guide to the Divine Truth] ("útbaigazítást, tájékoztatást adó könyv – Leitfaden, Führer"); 1759: a citation shows the word to mean queen bee ("méhkirálynő"); in 1844 the dictionary gives the first written example of the word's use as train conductor ("(menet)jegykezelő"). Both *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii Române* and the *Magyar Nyelvtörténeti Szótár* cite the Turkish origin of the word, "kilavuz," meaning guide, leader, nautical pilot or a marriage suitor. The word, in its sense of guide, commander, superior, chief, principal, exists in most other Eastern European and Balkan languages, including Bulgarian and Macedonian. In addition, in Albanian it has the sense of "kísérő," companion, follower, attendant, as well as of "bűnpártoló," accomplice; in Macedonian, of master-key; in Serbian and Croatian of guide, leader, animal – goat or horse – which leads a heard, master key, special cane which may be used as an agricultural tool, middleman, suitor, herald, spy or surveyor, and even, on the Dalmatian island of Rab, of a kind of shark (*Recnik srpskohrvatskog knjizevnog i narodnog jezika* [Dictionary of Serbo-Croatian Literary and Popular Language], vol. 9. The word itself is a perfect example a babelian intersection of languages, of the "bábeli nyelvzavar" mentioned in the chapter's subtitle.

This being said, it must be acknowledged that the word does present a translation problem: in Romanian it does not have the meaning of train conductor as it does in Hungarian. If believing that the form of this word is important and should survive translation, a translator might solve the problem by referring to the train conductor as a "călăuză," somewhere in the target text. The word strongly suggests that the journey Esti Kornél undertakes is unusual, and the role of his Bulgarian companion is more than that of train conductor. The Romanian "conductor (de tren)," which the translator uses unhesitatingly, is a word of Latin origin, and it has quite a different connotation than "călăuză." A "conductor" may lead one during a journey by train and even through a battlefield ("conducător") but does not necessarily guide one during an intellectual and spiritual journey as a "călăuză" does. This spiritual sense of the word can be found in its Hungarian counterpart as well. The *Magyar Nyelvtörténeti Szótár* explains that "kalauz" appears in the *Régi Magyar Könyvtár* as well as in Péter Pázmány's (1570–1637) sermons and cites the following example: "Még neve szerént is Dux exercitus Dei, az isten serege fő kalauzának neveztetik."[31] The signifier "kalauz," carries semantic connotations unique to this particular form and not to other synonyms.

These multiple meanings are not insignificant. They create a semantic multidimensionality, which is almost always lost in translation. At the same time, an attempt to carry a word like "kalauz" into the target language for the sake of its

[31] "Even nominally, the leader of God's army is called the Prince of God."

form may turn out to be an imitative act just as faulty as attempting to simply translate only its most obvious, general meaning, train conductor, while disregarding its other, implied meanings. Translating "kalauz" as "călăuză" may create a strangeness in the target text that is not there in the original. One of the crucial characteristics of Kosztolányi's fiction is that in it poetic effects are achieved with apparently simple language. The depth of his prose is not the result of an elevated style but rather of an elusive linguistic simplicity, which hides multiple semantic layers and simultaneously creates ambiguity and self-reflexivity at the level of linguistic form. Would an effect of otherness, strangeness, or estrangement created in the target text not interfere with the simple transmission of the story into the target language? What can be carried into the target language and what must be lost? Content or form, meaning or trope?

> Was ›sagt‹ denn eine Dichtung? Was teilt sie mit? Sehr wenig dem, der sie versteht. Ihr Wesentliches ist nicht Mitteilung, nicht Aussage. Dennoch könnte diejenige Übersetzung, welche vermitteln will, nichts vermitteln als die Mitteilung – also Unwesentliches. Das ist denn auch ein Erkennungszeichen der schlechten Übersetzungen ... Wenn in der Übersetzung die Verwandtschaft der Sprachen sich bekundet, so geschieht es anders als durch die vage Ähnlichkeit von Nachbildung und Original. Wie es denn überhaupt einleuchtet, daß Ähnlichkeit nicht notwendig bei Verwandtschaft sich einfinden muß. (Benjamin, 9, 13)

How this likeness (Ähnlichkeit*)* between adaptation (Nachbildung) and original should be interpreted is difficult to say. In the same essay, Walter Benjamin uses the metaphor of the amphora to illustrate the relationship between translation and original, between all languages and a pure language, "reine Sprache." Paul de Man's well-known interpretation of this metaphor relies on a paradox: "The translation is the fragment of a fragment, is breaking the fragment – so the vessel keeps breaking, constantly – and never reconstitutes it; there was no vessel in the first place, or we have no knowledge of this vessel, or no awareness, no access to it, so for all intents and purposes there has never been one" (de Man, 91). Only a few lines later de Man posits just a trace of pure language as recognizable in free, as opposed to faithful, translation: translation "can only be free if it reveals the instability of the original, and if it reveals that instability as the linguistic tension between trope and meaning. Pure language is perhaps more present in the translation than in the original, but in the mode of trope" (de Man, 92). And then again, in the same paragraph, "least of all is there something like a *reine Sprache*, a pure language, which does not exist except as a permanent disjunction, which inhabits all languages as such, including and especially the language one calls one's own. What is to be one's own language is the most displaced, the most alienated of all" (de Man, 92).

The amphora metaphor is as elusive as the relationship it tries to represent. While the nature and existence of a pure language is debatable, what Benjamin does state clearly is that the essential quality of a literary work is not that of communicating information. If there exists a likeness between translation and original, it does not come from a faithful transmission of content (Mitteilung). Any translation that attempts to transmit or impart information betrays the original: it betrays the tension between trope and meaning, which exists in the original, a tension that de Man agrees is revealed in translation.

III. Indeterminacy and Irony

Another contemporary of Kosztolányi's, the Polish philosopher and literary theorist Roman Ingarden, places the problem in a different light. Indeterminacy spots are created within the literary work because a real object can never be completely determined when it is represented as a literary object through nominal expressions:

> ... the represented object that is "real" according to its content is not in the strict sense of the term a universally, quite unequivocally determined individual that constitutes a primary unity; rather, it is only a schematic formation with spots of indeterminacy of various kinds and with an infinite number of determinations positively assigned to it, even though formally it is projected as a fully determinate individual and is called upon to simulate such an individual. This schematic structure of represented objects cannot be removed in any finite literary work, even though in the course of the work new spots of indeterminacy may continually be filled out and hence removed through the completion of newer, positively projected properties. We can say that, with regard to the determination of the objectivities represented within it, every literary work is in principle incomplete and always in need of further supplementation; in terms of the text, however, this supplementation can never be completed. ... [This constitutes] the basis and possibility for what we shall later, in a closer analysis, call the "life" of a literary work. (Ingarden, 251)

In light of this, the relationship between original and translation is worked out in terms not entirely different from those of Benjamin:

> If ... one were to translate a literary work of art in such a manner that the represented objectivities were indeed constituted in the same states of affairs and would possess entirely the same moments as the "original" but that, at the same time, the aspect stratum were changed by the use of a different phonetic material in such a way that, e.g., the

> previously predominant visual aspects were largely replaced in the translation by acoustic aspects, the total character of the work itself would be essentially altered. We could then justifiably ask whether we were still dealing with the same work of art. (Ingarden, 280)

Ingarden uses the example of translation in order to prove a point about reading: "it is only because when we read we usually go beyond what is simply presented in the work and overlook the spots of indeterminacy that we believe that in both cases we are dealing with a represented situation that is entirely 'the same'" (Ingarden, 280). By filling in the "spots of indeterminacy" a reader finds similarities between literary works which otherwise posses quite different "aesthetic valences" (Ingarden, 280). What creates a likeness between source and target text is the reader, who fills in the spots of indeterminacy.

It is here that an indeterminacy-based understanding of the literary work offers different insights into the nature of translation from those of Benjamin. As De Man explains, Walter Benjamin posits an aporia between freedom and faithfulness: translation, particularly free translation, reveals the instability of the original as the tension between trope and meaning (De Man, 92). Ingarden shows, as early as 1931, that the text does not deconstruct itself but that the spots of indeterminacy, which make a text unstable, depend on the reader: the tension created in literary representation between trope and meaning, signifier and signified, is reader-dependent.

Three[32] examples of words from the original can serve to illustrate this tension in this particular text: "szívszélhűdés," "összefüggő," and "kifényesedett." Unlike "kalauz" which, as a signifier, has equivalents in most East-Central European languages, the linguistic forms of these three words are inevitably lost in translation. Yet, it is their form which plays a crucial role in the source text, both at a rhetorical level and within the text's narrative structure.

1. The first example is the word "szívszélhűdés," an agglutination of "szív" (heart), "szél" (wind), and "hűdés" (stroke, paralysis). The word is an important one in the text because the episode is framed by allusions to death. Esti begins to tell his story for fear that sudden death might make the telling impossible and the uniqueness of his experience lost: "Ott történt velem ez, amit kár volna elhallgatnom. Végre akármikor meghalhatok – egy hajszálér megpattan a szívben vagy az agyban – s másvalaki – ebben bizonyos vagyok – ilyesmit nem élhet meg, soha" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 5).[33] In the end, when the train conductor's story con-

[32] Three is a somewhat arbitrary number—more examples of this type may be found in this text.

[33] "There something happened with me which it would be a pity to be silent about. In the end, I may die anytime – a capillary may burst in the heart or in the brain – and someone else – of this I am certain – could never live through such a thing."

fuses and frightens Esti, he withdraws into his compartment and falls suddenly asleep, as if having died of a heart attack: "Ott fejemet a gyűrött kispárnára ejtettem. Oly gyorsan *aludtam el*, mint aki *szívszélhűdés* következtében szörnyethal" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 12).[34] From this perspective it makes perfect sense to consider Esti's night journey unusual and terrifying.

One may think of this word as creating allusions to the other metaphors mentioned above: after "burning" along with the train conductor, Esti experiences an abrupt cooling ("hűtés"), a kind of sudden death. However, a look at an etymological dictionary shows, as any native speaker may be able to tell, that the "hű" in "szívszélhűdés" is not the same as the "hű" in "hűvös" (cool, fresh, refreshing, cold, distant) or "hűtés" (cooling, chilling). It is simply a lengthening of accent, the etymological dictionary explains, that transformed "hüdés" into "hűdés." Rather, "szélhűdés" derives from "szélütés,"[35] apoplexy, stroke – literally "széltől ütött," struck by the wind.[36] This allows an even more interesting association between the word and its context in the ninth episode: the *Magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára* (Vol. 3) [Dictionary of the Etymological History of the Hungarian Language] explains that, semantically, the word reflects the superstitious belief that the wind is inhabited by unearthly beings that may bring harm or illness to a human being. The train conductor may have such powers even if only figuratively—the text allows for this suggestion. However, at the end of the story the Bulgarian kalauz is also compared to a dog which faithfully awaits for Esti's awakening after his "szívszélhűdés" in the morning: "Csak állt-állt mellettem hűségesen, mint a kutya" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 12).[37] These words also establish a link between the train conductor and the dog in his own story. But is this dog faithful or vicious? Is the conductor a faithful kalauz or a mischievous one? Ironically, the comparison provides no definite answer. Esti's metaphorical death, "szívszélhűdés," represents an indeterminacy spot.

2. The verb "összefügg" (to be closely connected or bound to something; to have a bearing upon or relate to something) is composed of the prefix össze (together) and the verb függ (to hang down from, be suspended from; to hinge, de-

34 "There I let my head drop on the crumpled cushion. I fell asleep as quickly as if struck by a heart attack and killed on the spot."

35 "1808: „Széltöl ütött: Paralytikus"... hatására tévesen *szél* előtagú összetételnek értelmezték, mert a *-hüd* (*-höd*) képzőbokor ... ekkorra már teljesen elavult. A hűdés, hűdött alakváltozat hangsúly hatására bekövetkezett nyúlás eredménye (*A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára*, vol. 2).

36 The medical term was created during the language reform by Pál Bugát: "A második jelentés nyelvújítási, Bugát Pál alkotta a bénulás orvosi szakkifejezéseként. Ennek alapja a szél" (*A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára*, Vol. 3).

37 "[The conductor] just stood there by me faithfully like a dog."

pend upon). The adjectival form of the verb is used for the first time by Esti to characterize the train conductor's narrative: "Mondatainak üteméből mindenesetre kiéreztem, hogy egy kedélyes, vidám, hosszú lélegzetű és *összefüggő* történetet ad elő, mely széles, epikai mederben lassan és méltóságosan hömpölyög a kifejlet felé" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 9).[38] Esti uses "összefügg" again a few paragraphs later, this time to characterize his own confusion when faced with the conductor's questions: "Őszintén szólva szédülni kezdtem az élet mély, kibogozhatatlan zűrzavarától. Micsoda ez itt? Hogy *függ össze* ez a sok szó a nevetéssel és a sírással?" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 11).[39] Comparing the two different contexts in which the same word is used shows that its meaning is not fixed but dependent on the speaker's intentions.

In the first context *összefüggő* characterizes the majestic, uninterrupted narrative of the train conductor, which is in stark contrast with Esti's own recount of his train ride, a "telling" constantly interrupted by his own comments. The conductor's narrative style is also in contrast with the construction of the entire *Esti Kornél* cycle: a narrative made up of loosely interconnected episodes. If the conductor's story is összefüggő, connected, continuous and elaborate, then the cycle is constructed in a very different manner – a perfect example of the text's metafictionality. In the cycle's prefacing chapter Esti Kornél and the Author discuss their plans for writing something together in exactly these terms. It is not to be a novel but a kind of anti-novel:

> – Szóval útirajz lesz? – firtattam. – Vagy életrajz?
> – Egyik sem.
> – Regény?
> – Isten ments! Minden regény így kezdődik: „Egy fiatalember ment a sötét utcán, feltűrt gallérral." Aztán kiderül, hogy ez a feltűrt gallérú fiatalember a regényhős. *Érdekcsigázás*. Borzalmas.
> – Hát mi lesz?
> – Mind a három együtt. Útirajz, melyben elmesélem, hol szerettem volna utazni, regényes életrajz, melyben arról is számot adok, hogy a hős hányszor halt meg álmában. Egyet azonban kikötök. Össze ne *csirizeld* holmi bárgyú mesével. Maradjon minden annak, ami egy költőhöz illik: *töredéknek*. (Kosztolányi, 2000, 19)

> "In other words, will it be travelogue?" I insisted. "Or biography?"

[38] "From the rhythm of his sentences, in any case, I perceived that he brings to life a jovial, jolly, long-winded, and continuous account, flowing slowly and dignified toward resolution in its vast and epic riverbed."

[39] "To be honest, I was dizzied by life's deep and inextricable confusion. What is this? How do all these words add up to the laughter and the crying?"

> "Neither."
> "Novel?"
> "God forbid! Every novel begins this way: 'A young man was walking on a dark street, his collar turned up.' Then it turns out that this collar-turned-up young man is the novel's hero. Keyed up.[40] "Terrible."
> "Well, what will it be?"
> "All of the above. Travelogue, in which I relate where I would have liked to travel; romanced biography in which I will account even for how many times the hero died in his dreams. On one condition: just don't patch up some dull tale. Only what is fit for a poet should remain: the fragment."

The contrast between the train conductor's narrative, as Esti perceives it, and the manner in which the entire cycle is composed points to arguments concerning the nature of the modernist novel, which were being made during the 1920's and 1930's. One only has to recall the now famous 1924 Virginia Woolf essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" in which she publicly affirmed that "in or about December 1910, human character had changed" while privately, in her diary she was recording that "character is dissipated into shreds now" (Woolf, 248). This change in the perception of human character meant an implicit change in the nature of representation. The old Edwardian novelistic forms had to be broken, just as a window is smashed for air, to make room for the Georgian forms. Woolf had in mind the modernist experiments of Joyce, Eliot, Strachey, Forster, and Lawrence.

The dialogue between the Author and Esti also points to another argument about the nature of the modernist novel. Once again, what is lost in translation becomes revealing. It is very difficult to translate the verb "csirizel" – to smear and paste something with size. The word suggests a patching up, creating a whole out of pieces that fit together poorly or are not meant to fit together. Both "csirizel" and "érdekcsigázás," allude to Esti's dislike, not necessarily of the traditional novel, but of a manner of writing novels, which strains for easy effects, which does not seek to organically create a fictional world in its own right, or in Virginia Woolf's conception to represent the essential nature of human character. Length or completeness cannot define such a work. Paradoxically, Esti wants to keep only that which would satisfy poetic demands – the fragment – which has the double quality of being brief and, seemingly, unfinished. Esti's novel would have to resemble a poem. This concern with both the organic and fragmentary nature of the "new"

[40] "Érdekcsigázás" also poses revealing problems for the translator. The expression "felcsigázza valakinek az érdeklődését" means to excite someone's curiosity, to key up. Obviously, Esti uses the word here in a pejorative sense: the typical novelist he is criticizing strains after effects, tries to manipulate his reader by building excitement or raising curiosity in a forced way that goes against the grain or the nature of the genre – unnaturally or inorganically.

genre is not simply a violation of Kosztolányi's contemporary, popular form of the novel but a return to an earlier literary tradition. When Esti espouses a fragmentary but organic genre, which would suit a poet's ideals, he may be referring to the nineteenth-century Romantic cult for the fragment.

The second time Esti uses "összefügg" he is pressed to respond to the train conductor's story. When he sees that his first answer, "Yes," provokes tears and his second answer, "No," anger, he retreats to his compartment ashamed and confused: "Hogy *függ össze* ez a sok szó a nevetéssel és a sírással?" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 11)[41] The majestic and continuous (összefüggő) character of the conductor's narrative has failed to add up (függ össze) for Esti. Having tried to set up a trap for the conductor, Esti describes himself as being trapped at the end of their encounter: "Úgy látszott, hogy kelepcébe kerültem, s elhagyott jószerencsém" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 12).[42]

Two discrepancies may be pointed out here. The first appears in Esti's narrative style: he presents his story as an oral performance, he tells ("mesél") his story to his audience. It is important to remark that, in the first publication of this cycle by Genius Kiadás in 1933, each paragraph of the ninth chapter is introduced by a dialogue dash, emphasizing the oral, dialogic character of Esti's recount. These dialogue marks are maintained in the following two reprints of the cycle, in 1936 and 1940 by the Révai publishing house but they disappear inexplicably in all the editions which appear later. The fact that Esti *tells* his story to his audience contrasts with the sophisticated phrasing and intricate commentary he brings to his own anecdote, which betrays the act of writing. This contrast sends to another dichotomy set up within the text, that between the written and the spoken word. Yet, the very nature of the written text is such that it cannot capture spoken language. As Esti is a character within his own story and within the larger *Esti Kornél* cycle, the same dichotomy is both set up and undermined within the text. Esti takes great pains trying to convince his audience that his reasoning and actions are faultless but language has the better of him even as he tries to rise above it.

The second discrepancy is related to Esti's guilt. This is a burden he was carrying even before his encounter with the conductor, as the expression "Köröttem minden utas az igazak álmát aludta"[43] signalled at the very beginning of the story. Here, the problem is not necessarily a moral fault or an emotional insensitivity but, rather, that Esti is caught in a linguistic system he does not understand but which he pretends to understand. Interestingly, Esti takes great pains to convince his audience that his actions are faultless ("El kell ismernetek, hogy fellépésem

41 "How do all these words add up to the laughter and the crying?"

42 "It seemed I had fallen into a trap and my luck had deserted me."

43 "Around me every passenger slept the dream of the true."

mindjárt az első pillanattól fogva biztos és hibátlan volt" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 7)[44] but this has the opposite effect: it points to his guilt or to his having a guilt-ridden conscience. The reason for this guilt is never spelled out in this chapter and remains a spot of indeterminacy within the text. However, the indeterminacy of this guilt creates a link between this chapter and the other episodes of the *Esti Kornél* cycle. For instance, it can be connected with the cycle's introductory chapter in which Esti's childhood friend, the narrator, describes the protagonist as a worldly wonderer, rising freely in his flight above nations in praise of eternal revolution. Even as an adult who has now travelled the world and become a polyglot, Esti plays the same role he had assumed as a young man. Esti's undetermined guilt may have roots in this role or, rather, in the impossibility of transcending this role.

On the other hand, the conductor's reaction is also intriguing: why do Esti's responses provoke such anguish and anger within him? If, at least for a moment, we suspend disbelief and take Esti's story at face value, we have to believe the conductor never doubts that Esti understands Bulgarian perfectly. His reactions, then, can be seen as a sign of feeling isolated within his own language. After all, he fails to make another fellow Bulgarian understand his story. Whereas Esti found himself trapped outside his own language, the conductor is trapped within it.

> What translation does, by reference to the fiction or hypothesis of a pure language devoid of the burden of meaning, is that it implies – in bringing to light what Benjamin calls "die Wehen des eigenen" – the suffering of what one thinks of as one's own – the suffering of the original language. We think we are at ease in our own language, we feel a coziness, a familiarity, a shelter in the language we call our own, in which we think that we are not alienated. What the translation reveals is that this alienation is at its strongest in our relation to our own original language, that the original language within which we are engaged is disarticulated in a way which imposes upon us a particular alienation, a particular suffering. (De Man, 84)

In this sense, we may consider the Bulgarian train conductor's reaction to be much like that of Esti, who, pushed out of the context of his own language and culture, finds himself in a kind of hell. The conductor may be experiencing the same kind of alienation but within his own language: "What is to be one's own language is the most displaced, the most alienated of all" (De Man, 92). In this sense, we may be able to see Esti and the Bulgarian, pilgrim and kalauz, as faces of the same coin. Below I discuss the dichotomies native/foreign, organic/artificial only to reach the same conclusion: these dichotomies are undermined from within the text – there can be no clear opposition delineated between them. The use of "összefüggő" and "függ össze" hint at this duplicity, establishing a spot of inde-

[44] "You must know that my behavior was confident and faultless from the very first moment."

terminacy. The effect of such related oppositions shows that "indeterminacy goes together with irony" (Szegedy-Maszák, 2000, 184).

3. The third example is the reflexive verb "kifényesedik" (to become polished, shiny). The verb is used in its Past Tense form "kifényesedett" (polished, buffed, worn out). Esti uses this word to describe the language of the native who rarely speaks and even then uses words sparingly: "Akkor is a használattól *kifényesedett*, kopott szókat vetnek oda, álmosan, az anyanyelv bennük szunnyadó gazdag és rejtett kincseiből" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 7).[45] The native speaker avoids, is literally afraid of using, precise and literary language: "Általában fáznak a választékos fordulatok, a szabatos és irodalmi szerkezetek alkalmazásától" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 7).[46] The verb "fáznak" presents another translation problem because of its double meaning: to be or feel cold, chilly, and to fear, avoid doing something. The sense is that the conductor does not only avoid using carefully-chosen constructions – of the type Esti relishes – but also fears them, turns cold to them – or they turn him cold.

Esti uses the adjective "fényes" (polished, slick, shiny, bright, radiant) again a few paragraphs later, this time to describe the brilliance of his own reasoning: "Hogy okoskodásom nem volt alaptalan, azt a következők *fényesen* igazolták" (Kosztolányi, 2000, 8).[47] The contrast between the two different uses of the same word is one which Esti has been striving to set up all along: the difference between the way a native speaker and the educated, self-conscious speaker use language, the difference between the Bulgarian train conductor's narrative, as Esti perceives it, and his own. When Esti describes the "natural speaker," who avoids and may even be afraid of using language in this way, he also describes himself as being the opposite: painfully aware of language, an educated speaker, who likes to use carefully-chosen phrases and literary constructions. A dichotomy is created: for the Bulgarian train conductor language is an intrinsic, organic whole while for Esti, the cosmopolitan polyglot, language has become an artificial tool.

Yet this organic-artificial opposition is challenged when Esti questions the "hidden treasures" of the native speaker's mother tongue by placing him on an academic podium and finding out that, actually, he hardly knows his own language – an ironic turn of argument, perhaps a subtle criticism of populist ideals:

> Lehetőleg nem beszélnek, amit okosan is tesznek, hiszen ha több óra hosszáig kellene előadniok egy dobogón, vagy egy húszíves könyvet kellene írniok, róluk is hamarosan kimutatnák részint hallgatóik,

45 "Even the they throw out there drowsily a polished, worn-out word out of the rich and hidden treasures of the mother-tongue slumbering within them."

46 "They generally shy away from carefully-chosen phrases, the use of precise and literary constructions."

47 "What followed demonstrated illustriously that my reasoning was not unfounded."

> részint bírálóik – mégpedig nem egészen alaptalanul – hogy tulajdon anyanyelvükhöz se konyítanak. (Kosztolányi, 2000, 7)[48]

The dichotomies native/learned, artificial/organic are undermined from within the text itself by the commentary Esti grafts onto his own story. The use of "kifényesedett" and "fényes" creates indeterminacy, a moment when choosing one meaning over another becomes impossible. The possibility of interpreting correctly, of there existing a single truth behind language, is dismissed. We must not forget that, although the episode is framed by allusions to death, it also begins and ends with contradictory remarks: travelling through a foreign land can be both a spiritually numbing experience and terribly funny; yes and no are interchangeable. Such ironic "turns" are found at every level of the text: at the level of the story and plot as well as within the narrative and rhetorical structure of the text. But the irony Kosztolányi employs is not the verbal kind in which a literal reference is simply contrasted to a figurative sense. Kosztolányi's text presents the reader with multiple meanings and makes it impossible to select one over the others. The nature of this irony is anti-didactic:

> ...in Romantic irony there are alternative meanings, none of which is unambiguously apparent or real. The infinite regressiveness of its value structure cannot be interpreted in terms of rhetoric. For the same reason, it is very easy to misread it, since it is not "stable" or "fixed," in any neo-Aristotelian sense; no definitive reconstruction of its meaning can be made. The reader is constantly invited to undermine his interpretation; there is no explanation with which he could rest secure. (Szegedy-Maszák, 1988, 205)

Nineteenth-century Hungarian authors, such as Mihály Vörösmarty, Sándor Petőfi, István Széchenyi, János Arany, Zsigmond Kemény, and Imre Madách, were reinterpreting the classical rhetorical tradition in which eironeia was thought of as dissimulation and the concept of Romantic irony, which emerged, was comparable to that of Friedrich Schlegel and Kierkegaard. It is within this tradition that Kosztolányi's work may also be inscribed. Parallels could be drawn between Kosztolányi's use of irony and that of most of the authors mentioned above. But most interesting is a similarity with the narrative perspective employed by Zsigmond Kemény in his 1853 novel, *Ködképek a kedély láthatárán* [Phantom Visions on the Soul's Horizon]: "it is not possible to decide which is the correct explanation because there is no implied author (authorizor or authenticator) in the text who might control and judge Várhelyi's interpretations" (Szegedy-Maszák, 1988, 217).

[48] If possible, they do no speak, and they do so wisely, because if they had to expound for a few hours on a podium, or if they had to write twenty press sheets, before long, partly their audience and partly their critics would point out – for that matter not entirely without reason – that they do not quite know their mother tongue either.

There is no omniscient narrator in the ninth episode of *Esti Kornél*. The episode's first sentence contains a hint that such a narrator might exist. But this extradiegetic[49] narrator never reappears. And although there are clear hints throughout the text that Esti is not in complete control of his own narrative, no one else is either. The narrative structure of the *Bolgár Kalauz* episode creates a chinese-box effect. Yet, the episode lacks an enclosure, an outer layer, as well as a center. This makes it impossible to find a fixed vantage point within the text from which to interpret and explain its intrinsic, ironic ambiguities.

The episode begins with the sentence: "Ezt el kell mesélnem nektek – szólt Esti Kornél." The clause "szólt Esti Kornél" is important because it hints at the presence of a narrator other than Esti Kornél. However, it is impossible to say with certainty whether this extradiegetic narrator is the Author who, in the prefatory chapter, had planned the cycle with Esti. In fact, it is possible to say hardly anything about him as there are no other traces of his presence for the remainder of the episode. His presence in the first sentence of the story has the function of creating another narrative level within which Esti's story is inscribed: it makes it clear that this is not simply the story Esti recounts for his fictive audience but a story about Esti's story. The narrative levels continue to multiply as Esti narrates his story, acts as a commentator of his own story and as a character within it. Thus, Esti is both an intradiegetic, a diegetic and a metadiegetic narrator.

Matters are complicated even more by the fact that at the center of the episode we find another unsolvable mystery: the Bulgarian train conductor's story is never understood by Esti, who knows no Bulgarian. Not knowing the conductor's story means lacking a basis, a context for interpretation. Yet, Esti interprets anyway, much like a translator who translates freely from a language he does not quite know. In turn, Esti's audience, the first-sentence narrator, and the reader of "Chapter Nine," are forced to interpret on the same terms. This lack of context has created an exchange in which words have lost their distinctive semantic content: "yes is no and no is yes" bears a strange resemblance to the three witches' incantations in *Macbeth* and signals linguistic chaos.

[49] Here I am using Gérard Genette's classification of narrative levels: "The narrating instance of a first narrative is therefore extradiegetic by definition, as the narrating instance of a second (metadiegetic) narrative is diegetic by definition, etc." (Genette, 229). Several levels of narration may enclose one another: extradiegetic, diegetic or intradiegetic, metadiegetic and so on. A mise-en-abîme effect is created and it is important to note that Genette defines these levels not as a function of distance but as a function of level: a narrative is contained within another one "not only in the sense that the first frames it with a preamble and a conclusion ..., but also in the sense that the narrator of the second narrative is already a character in the first one, and that the act of narrating which produces the second narrative is an event recounted in the first one" (Genette, 228). However, this spilling over of events and narrative acts from one level into another makes a clear differentiation between narrators and narrative levels difficult, if not impossible, despite attempts at strict categorizing and naming.

There are at least two consequences. The first, pertaining directly to the story, has already been mentioned: an objective vantage point from which to evaluate Esti's encounter with the Bulgarian train conductor is impossible to find. The second, pertaining more generally to Kosztolányi's views on language, is that the story may be interpreted as a fictional expression of his belief that language is not a tool for transmitting information.

In his 1930 open letter to Antoine Meillet, "A Magyar nyelv helye a földgolyón" ("The Place of the Hungarian Language on Earth"), Kosztolányi openly expressed his criticism of the dominance of some linguistic communities over others. Meillet, a disciple of Ferdinand de Saussure, had argued in favor of a scientific system of linguistic gradation composed in the tradition of seventeenth-century linguistic rationalism. He affirmed that in a modern age in which rationality seeks to replace tradition linguistic uniformity and standardization should replace the Babelian linguistic disorder and variety of Europe. Smaller, more isolated linguistic communities should, of their own accord, give up their language and adopt a more widely spoken, more civilized language, namely French. Kosztolányi objected to the arbitrariness with which Meillet defined the superiority of some languages over others. For the Hungarian author, the move to renounce one's language would be absurd and impossible: language rather than ethnicity defines a community, creating its particular worldview. This linguistic and cultural relativism implies that every language is unique and no linguistic community is superior to another. At the same time, the uniqueness of every language-created world view implies isolation, an impossibility of complete understanding and communication between different linguistic communities. Kosztolányi, who had a serious interest in linguistics, was an avid translator and, much like the protagonist of the ninth episode, was multi-lingual, likened language to a flower which, though unnoticed, develops naturally and uniquely in its environment:

> Pillanatnyi büszkeségem után tehát ismét alázat fog el, s szeretet, csodálat minden nyelv iránt. Arra, hogy mi az értelme annak, hogy egy nép saját nyelvét beszéli, és mi az értelme annak, hogy mi magyarul beszélünk, éppoly kevéssé lehet ésszerűen válaszolni, mint arra, hogy mi az értelme annak, hogy egyáltalán élünk. Itt valami titok kezdődik.
>
> Múltkor egy erdőben bolyongtam, ahol óraszámra nem találkoztam járókelővel. Valami tisztáson megpillantottam egy virágot, melynek az a szeszélye, hogy csak Európa e keleti szögén terem, a mi hazánkban, s egyebütt gyökeret se ver. Aranylennek nevezzük mi, *Linum dolomiticum*-nak tudósaink. Megálltam előtte. Azon töprengtem, hogy miért oly tökéletes a levele, hogy miért oly kecsesen-lenge, hogy miért oly aranysárga a szirma, s egyáltalán miért virít, mikor valószínűleg egész nyáron nem látja emberi szem ezen az ember nem járta mezőn, s valószínűleg el fog hervadni, anélkül hogy valaki észre-

> venné, anélkül hogy valaki gyönyörködnék benne. Mégis virágzik errefelé az aranylen, nagyon sok aranylen. Nem kérdezi, hogy mi ennek az értelme, s nem törődik azzal sem, hogy másutt az azáleákat és a nympheákat becézgetik. Amíg él, addig tökéletes és szép akar lenni, s arcát a nap felé fordítja. Aztán mindig nőnek helyette újak. Virágzik és elhervad, mint minden, ami van, mint a „nagy" népek és a „kis" népek, mint a „ civilizáció". Virágzunk és elhervadunk. Talán csak ennyi az élet értelme. (Kosztolányi , 1999, 97)

> After my momentary lapse of pride, then, I once more find myself overwhelmed by humility, and love and admiration for every language. It is as impossible to give a rational answer to what the point is of a people speaking their own language, of our speaking Hungarian, as it is to determine what the point is in living at all. Some mystery is in preparation here.
>
> Some time ago I was wandering in a forest where hours went by without my seeing another face. In a clearing I caught sight of a flower that is capricious enough to bloom only in this eastern corner of Europe, in my homeland, and refuses to take root elsewhere. We call it golden flax, our erudite scientists call it, *linum dolomiticum*. I stopped before it and wondered why its leaves were so perfect, why it was so light and graceful, its petals so golden and why it bothered to bloom at all when there was no one to see it in this forsaken spot where it would wither and die without anyone noticing it, without anyone delighting in the sight of it, all summer long. And still golden flax blooms in this spot, lots and lots of golden flax. It does not ask whether there is a point in its blooming and does not care that elsewhere it is azaleas and nympheas that people pamper and pet. It is perfect while it lives and wants to be beautiful and turns its face up to the sun. And there are always new flowers to take the place of the withered ones, new blooms of golden flax. It blossoms and fades like everything else that exists on this earth, like "great" nations and "small" nations, like "civilization" itself. We bloom and we fade. Perhaps this is the point of living—this and nothing else. (Kosztolányi, 1987, tr. Eszter Molnár, 36–37)

If language is not just a system of linguistic norms but also a system of cultural norms as it determines an individual's way of seeing the world from within that individual's community, stepping outside of one's language means stepping outside one's world. If not impossible, this is an experience of complete estrangement, a kind of death. Yet even this conclusion is challenged: there is nothing within the ninth episode of *Esti Kornél* that allows us to characterize Esti's journey as a purely hellish one.

The knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*, writes Thomas De Quincey, establishes a clear border between the world of darkness and the human world in the Shake-

spearean play. It "makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced: the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the reestablishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live, first make us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that has suspended them" (De Quincey, 539). Yet the world of darkness Kosztolányi created in the ninth chapter of the *Esti Kornél* cycle is not fiendish and the pulses of life have not been suppressed within it. On the contrary, it may provide illuminations impossible to arrive at in everyday circumstances. There are no clear signs, in this episode, that the return to the goings-on of the world in which we live is a better alternative to the world which has suspended them. The normality of the *real* world may be its very defect. When in the cycle's prefatory chapter, Esti and the Author plan to write a new type of work, Esti suggests that the world of dream may be superior to that of the everyday:

> – Csak magamról beszélhetek. Arról, ami történt velem. Mi is történt? Várj csak. Voltaképp semmi. A legtöbb emberrel alig történik valami. De sokat képzelődtem. Ez is az életünkhöz tartozik. Nemcsak az az igazság, hogy megcsókoltunk egy nőt, hanem az is, hogy titokban vágyakoztunk rá, s meg akartuk csókolni. Sokszor maga a nő a hazugság, és a vágy az igazság. Egy álom is valóság. (Kosztolányi, 2000, 18)

> I can speak only of myself. Of what happened to me. What did happen? Just wait. In fact nothing. With the majority of people hardly anything happens. But I've imagined a lot. This also belongs to our life. Truth is not only the fact that we kissed a woman, but also that we longed for her in secret and wanted to kiss her. Many times the woman herself is a lie and the desire is the truth. A dream is also reality.

A dream, if Esti's train journey may be so called, allows for oppositions to coexist: natural and artificial, a native speaker who uses language spontaneously and a man of letters who uses language consciously. The dichotomies Esti has tried to set up are challenged from within the text. A text in which language has a mind of its own and controls characters more than any omniscient author-narrator is also, paradoxically, a text which begs for translation and interpretation. Within it indeterminacy and irony allow for the existence of more than one truth, of more than one point of view.

If, following the thread offered by the word "kalauz," we consider Kosztolányi's essay on Péter Pázmány's sermons, we may draw an interesting parallel between the Hungarian poet and novelist's ideas about language and the ninth chapter of the *Esti Kornél* cycle. In this essay, Kosztolányi argues that, generally, prose fades ("megfakul") and frays ("kirojtosodik") faster than verse and that poetry subsists

on a plane higher than that of everyday, spoken language. At the same time, the Hungarian essayist places Péter Pázmány's prose sermons on the same plane as poetry. For Kosztolányi, the seventeenth-century archbishop's prose has not grown old ("régies") nor foreign ("idegenszerű"). Even more interesting in this context is Kosztolányi's description of Pázmány's prose: "Régen lelohadtak a lángok, melyek írásait körülcsapkodták, hamuvá rogyott a parázs, megmaradt azonban a forma, a halhatatlan edény, melybe mondanivalóját öntötte" (49).[50] While the content of Pázmány's arguments have become obsolete, the immortal, golden bowl, the language that rendered these arguments, has remained untouched by the passing of time. In these lines, which describe Pázmány's writings so vividly, we find not only metaphors that resonate with those of the ninth chapter of *Esti Kornél* but also the idea that the purpose of language is not to convey a message nor to express a truth.

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[50] "The flames that lashed his writings have subsided long ago, the coals have collapsed into ashes, but the form remained, the immortal bowl in which he poured what he had to say."