

## 7. Writing the Self – Making the Self: Diary-keeping as Cultural Practice in Early Nineteenth-Century Hungary

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### History from Below

**T**he 1825/27 session of the Hungarian Diet (i.e. Parliament) is a turning point in Hungarian historical narratives. It was the first Diet at which the House of Commons and the House of Lords agreed that it was high time for a reform of the Hungarian legal system. The desire for modernisation was a direct consequence of the economic crisis after the Napoleonic wars, and the King, Ferenc I (also called Franz II in his quality as the last Holy Roman Emperor, Franz I as the Emperor of the

Habsburg Monarchy or František I as the King of Bohemia) had to convene the Diet to solve certain problems with the Hungarian Estates (*Status et Ordines*). On 3 November 1825 Count István Széchenyi (1791–1860) made available a very large amount of money (the annual income of his lordship) to establish the Society of Hungarian Scholars (i.e. the Academy). This was noteworthy because Széchenyi was the head of one of the richest families in Hungary. After this donation, the Hungarian elite (first of all the aristocracy) became more active in instigating a number of political and cultural reforms, and this period is accordingly known as the ‘Age of Reforms’ in Hungarian historiography.

This Diet was also a turning point in another sense. It was held in Pozsony (today Bratislava, Slovakia), and in that urban context the political and social activities of the participants cannot be separated. The patterns of sociability established there did not end with the session of the Diet. Several aristocrats moved to the new capital Pest (Pest and Buda were separate cities that time); there they rented suites of rooms, while some had palaces built in the centre of the city. Because they started to live close to each other, both their private and their public lives underwent significant changes. In their case, we cannot understand the private without the public and vice versa, and similarly, in reading the historical sources we need to take account of their rapidly changing status; for example, the frequency of hand-written correspondence as a form of public political discourse declined, while

that of printing increased. Their shared practices had the function of reformulating the political and cultural public sphere, but this does not mean either that they agreed about what reform meant or that they were free to deploy new cultural techniques as they wished. Indeed, although politics and social habits were changing, the habitus of the long eighteenth century would live on for decades.<sup>1</sup>

Let me invoke a few preliminary examples of the interpenetration of public and private—or more specifically the publicness of private life. On 1 March 1828, a woman called Júlia wrote to Count József Dessewffy (1771–1843), the protagonist of this essay,<sup>2</sup> who had left Pozsony and spent his days in Pest. She told him she was missing him: ‘Gravely, you have forgotten my name-day, but I would not forget you by no manner of means. This proves that my feelings are stronger. We have a number of occasions to amuse ourselves here, even during the time of Lent. Prince Ferenc Pálffy set up a small stage in his home, where the distinguished company put on smaller comedies and tableaux vivants.’<sup>3</sup> The letter was promptly intercepted by the Imperial secret police and forwarded to Vienna. Another example of secret desire is the way Széchenyi courted Countess Crescence Seilern.<sup>4</sup> He recorded every little movement of his soul in his personal diary. But the ‘secret’ of his private life was in fact known to contemporaries, as this famous politician appeared at every social event beside his lover.<sup>5</sup> The publicity of private life is also evident

in the way Széchenyi described the illness of his best friend and political ally, Baron Miklós Wesselényi (1796–1850). He made a note about it in his diary in German: ‘Wesselényi, after some Transylvanian whims, of which I had disapproved, got seriously ill.’<sup>6</sup> Wesselényi’s own diary makes clear that, after skipping meals for five days while he was ill, he went to the Casino and, for the sake of the audience, ate five meals to make up for what he had missed.<sup>7</sup> These examples draw our attention to the various and complementary ways of using the public sphere and private and representative spaces. This difference is what interests me in this chapter: I attempt to uncover a moment of historical change by analysing the genre of diary through a Habsburg Hungarian example, Count Dessewffy’s diary for 1828, taking into account the peculiar character of Central European society as a relatively late arrival to the cultures of political liberalism and the bourgeois self.<sup>8</sup> My study of Dessewffy’s diary shows how private and representative spheres related to each other, and how the everyday practice of diary-keeping reformulated the public space and time. Key to my analysis is the character of diary-keeping as a manuscript practice—one which (unusually, we suppose) Dessewffy did not reserve for himself, but in fact shared with his secretary, to whom he dictated some—though not all—of his journal.

## The Diary as a Literary Form

Since the late 1960s, thanks to the emergence of historical anthropology, and to scholarly interest in the genre of autobiography—especially by Philippe Lejeune<sup>9</sup>—scholars have turned their attention to the diary as a literary genre. To be sure, there exists an embarrassing diversity of opinions about what a diary is, and many have concluded that it is impossible to define. We nevertheless need to understand why and how literary forms staging the self, of which diaries of all kinds are a manifestation, spread on a vast scale from the seventeenth century in Europe.

Two different though not contradictory explanations have been given for the increasing popularity of the diary: on the one hand, the desire of early modern people to construct their personal and conscious selves (i.e. subjectivity itself), and on the other, the desire to assemble the elements of the self to meet the demands of Protestant piety for self-reflection and -improvement. The latter throws light convincingly on the genesis of the private diary as a genre at a particular historical moment,<sup>10</sup> but it is less comprehensible why diary-keeping and the new practice of writing appeared those spheres of social life which were devoid of the 'Protestant ethic of self-scrutiny'. The diaries of Samuel Ward (1572–1643), the Cambridge professor of theology, who had made so sophisticated commentaries of the Bible; those of Nehemiah Wallington (1598–1658) the puritan wood-turner,

who left a monumental record of daily activities, or of Ralph Josselin (1616–1683), the seventeenth-century clergyman, are strongly related to the Protestant tradition.<sup>11</sup> However, the religious ideology is less helpful to explain the publication that has been most influential in recent years: the diaries of Samuel Pepys (1633–1703).<sup>12</sup> Another exception is the diary of Robert Hooke (1635–1703), the polyhistor and scholar of natural sciences, which was more a part of the author's scientific project than an imprint of his theological or religious background.<sup>13</sup> In Central Europe it is easy to recognise the nexus between the social habits of diary-keeping and the ideology of Protestantism; in Habsburg Hungary, for example, the Protestant aristocrats, Count Lajos Gyulay (1800–1869)<sup>14</sup> and Baron Miklós Wesselényi kept diaries for their whole life. This might be interpreted as a Protestant praxis of creating their selves, yet the similar diary of the Catholic Count István Széchenyi originated from another tradition, namely that of literature of sensibility,<sup>15</sup> while the diary of István Horvát (1784–1846), the custodian of the National Museum's library, is essentially a scholar's own monument written to promote his future fame.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, different traditions of writing practices mixed in the multilingual and multiconfessional Hungary.

The self-expression of a subject raises a number of questions. The more complex or more contradictory the linguistic environment in which the author lives, the richer and more ambivalent are his or her utterances. These utterances, at least if they are

public, will in turn contribute to shaping the linguistic environment.<sup>17</sup> The mimetic power of the diary can easily tempt its reader to treat it as a window on the inner world of the diarist, to look behind the words, to imagine actual events behind the descriptions, scenes in somebody else's life—in short to read the diary as though it were a retrospective representation of the time in which it was created. However, H. Porter Abbott warns us that the text of the diary has a far more complex structure, inasmuch as the reality created by the diary has a dual character *eo ipso*: the reality which is presented in an imaginary world constructed in the text, and the authenticity of the document as an object. That is, the reader of the diary supposes that the subject of the diary existed and wrote the original manuscript.<sup>18</sup> Self-reflexive texts can be found often in a diary: the subject of the diary reads their own reflections into their own diary and observes the act of writing. The subject who writes a diary presents the written subject (i.e. himself or herself presented in the diary) as a subject who is writing a diary. The basis of that is an anthropology, in which life is the raw material. Yet this material can be understood as something that a person lives through only in order to provide the experiences to be written in the diary.

Different types of diaries (e.g. the genre of Latin *diarium*) have existed at least since the fifteenth century. However, the birth of the early modern diary is commonly associated with the

self-disciplined bourgeois identity. Through an analysis of the diaries of Samuel Pepys the literary scholar Francis Barker divides the self into a public persona and an inner self who writes the diary. He sees the diary as mediating between these two poles.<sup>19</sup> Barker suggests that the English Revolution resulted in connecting subject and discourse, subject and polity, body and mind, language and meaning in a new way. This new constellation of power and anthropology placed the subject in a domesticated milieu as a private individual, in contrast to the self-contained bourgeois of the public sphere. On the one hand, we can observe the etiquette of the civil servant in their public and representative world, while, on the other hand, the private self with secret desires, passions and maladies hides the non-public life in a diary.<sup>20</sup> It is worth considering that Barker's work links the practice of writing as self-representation and the analysis of the socio-historical environment.<sup>21</sup> However, by conceptualising the diary as a reflection of the social world, this method overlooks the fact that diary-keeping is also a reaction of the diarist to his or her emerging self.

The hermeneutic situation set up by the diary is not a simple one, and this complexity is the reason (as a kind of *causa finalis*) that this genre coexists in so many forms and rhetorical variants. If it is considered from the viewpoint of the implied reader, it results in some problems, too. The diary is not written for the public sphere, and—of course with some exceptions to the rule—



often the implied reader is identical to the author.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, diarists frequently use shortened or condensed forms: contraction of words, abbreviations, compressed syntax, ellipses, complex episodes concentrated into long clauses, or several forms of deixis. Samuel Pepys wrote his diary in shorthand for ten years—and this is why we may interpret it as a text that was written for the author himself.

It is true that Pepys, like Gyulay, may very well have envisaged a future readership, and John Evelyn and Horvát clearly made their entries to instruct posterity.<sup>23</sup> It is no coincidence that after the death of Széchenyi, his secretary Antal Tasner deleted or literally cut out of the Count's diary inconvenient parts of the text which would have put the diarist to shame if the diary had been found or published. Whatever the case, the diary's 'natural' medium is the manuscript, and the territory of publicity is originally very small, unless and until an enthusiastic bookseller publishes it to please the public. The reader then becomes a voyeur, looking into the secret inner life of a well-known or a lesser-known public diarist. If a diary is to be used as a source for social history, we can take advantage of its medial position between public and private to learn something about both: its writer's subjective perception of space and time can be analysed, and the diarist's own conception of the public sphere that emerges from this analysis can inform our understanding of the kind of publicity a text gained. In short, the question of why someone keeps a diary

should be reconsidered in terms of the act of writing, with the rhetorical-discursive practices enacted in the text seen as a use of writing, rather than subjected to a psychohistorical approach that looks for sincere moments in an authentic document of life.

Finally, it is worth considering that diary-keeping as a form of communication was typically associated with the upper classes. In Central Europe, especially in the Eastern side of that, the aristocracy adopted this practice of writing as a form of managing space and time. In this region the early modern structural change of the public sphere was not linked to the decline of the aristocracy and/or the rise of the middle class. The change was promoted by the upper classes (i.e. by the aristocracy), and the middle class merely followed them on their way. There are several reasons for this. First, in East-Central Europe there was a smaller urban population than in Western Europe, so that the market could support only a few cultural institutions. The Western forms of public sphere and the question of reconceptualising the nation intertwined in East-Central Europe. In Hungary, for instance, the language of politics and law was Latin, and the aristocracy used German, French and their native languages (Hungarian, Slovak, Rumanian etc.) in the second half of the eighteenth century. The overwhelming majority of the urban population spoke German at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> It took the next few decades for the upper classes to begin to use Magyar (Hungarian) as their native language and for it to become the

basic source of national culture and the communicative instrument of politics. The culture of the Hungarian capital changed very quickly. German speakers adopted the Hungarian language (or at least they became bilingual), prominent members of the aristocracy had palaces built, some of them hired rooms at hotels where they discussed political matters in Hungarian. Importantly, the change of language implies the shift of the notion of nationality. This process was closely connected to the adaption of Western forms of literacy, inasmuch as the upper and middle classes tried to modernise society by using these forms and establishing modern institutions. In addition, it is important to note that despite some similarities, the new cultural practices, institutions and forms of literacy were not reproductions of Western originals. While the structural transformation of the public sphere, as Jürgen Habermas suggests, was the main indicator of a social change in the West, the same devices of the public sphere preserved the social order in East-Central Europe.

Diary-keeping is a traditional practice of literacy. Yet it was easy to integrate it into a new cultural practice, because the diary can be understood as a mixture between private and public spheres. On the one hand, the diary is a document about the personal experience of social practices and representations and, on the other it is the imprint of the hiding private self who retreats from society to a private resort. In 1817 Count Ferenc Teleki (1785–1831) fell into an argument with Gábor Döbrentei (1785–

1851)<sup>25</sup> at a masked ball. They debated whether the Hungarian aristocrats should speak their mother tongue or a language of Western European culture (e.g. French or German). Teleki opined that being cultured didn't depend on using one's native language, but a few hours after the ball he changed his mind at home. The Count remembered several years later: 'When I was writing about our heated debate in my diary that evening—for I've been taking notes of everything that happens to me for a long time—I felt shame at being Hungarian when I recalled my negative arguments.'<sup>26</sup> As the private self carried on and convinced the public self about the power and importance of Hungarian culture the debate continued through the writing of the diary. It is not an accident that in this case a diary helped its writer to refigure his or her life.

### Anthropology of the Diary

The author of the diary I selected here is Count Dessewffy. He was a well-known politician and also a lesser-known writer. Although he was a born aristocrat and he could have been a senator in the *Tabula magnatum* (House of Lords) he was a deputy to the *Tabula statuum et ordinum* (House of Commons) five times.<sup>27</sup> He published his poems in periodicals, and he also published a sentimental novel in which he related his journey to a spa (Bártfa, today: Bardojevo, Slovakia) in a series of letters. He was a sponsor of literature (he financed one of the most important

literary magazines at the time), and also paid a substantial amount to a swindler to finance the invention of a perpetual-motion machine.

The Count lived most of his life on his estate (Szentmihály, today: Tiszavasvári, Hungary) which was situated about 200 km from the capital. He kept in touch with his friends and servants by writing letters.<sup>28</sup> But Dessewffy's circumstances changed radically in the second decade of the nineteenth century, as a result not only of the constitutional changes which led to a new session of Diet, but also of the increasing urbanisation of Pest and Buda and the new institutions of social life that accompanied it. When Dessewffy arrived in Pest in January 1828 he found himself in a quite new atmosphere, in which members of the Hungarian nobility displayed themselves in public promenades and nightly elegant balls, and new spaces of conversation were established where ladies and gentlemen could display their sensibility and practise their refined manners.

Dessewffy took notes about his everyday impressions. The diary itself can be found in the National Széchényi Library in Budapest.<sup>29</sup> The manuscript consists of seventy-six octavo pages. There is a title on the first page: *Physical, moral and social life in Pest 1828*. The entries are continuous from 22 January to 11 February, and after a pause, there are three more entries (on 13 and 16 March and one undated). It is not clear whether this short and fragmented diary was part of a long-term diary that Dessewffy

kept all of his life, or if it was just an occasional attempt to record his experiences. Dessewffy was a habitual writer: there are thousands of letters, two thick books of miscellaneous notes, twelve books in which he recorded peculiar Hungarian idiomatic words, and several running meters of manuscripts in which he put summaries of his readings in various archives. Although we have no end of manuscripts from him, most of this heritage was not written by Dessewffy himself. Whenever he had an opportunity to avoid writing, he dictated his texts to his secretary (even his poems or sensible private letters). In the diary of 1828 both the Count's and his secretary's hand can be found.

Why did Dessewffy travel to the capital when he did? He had several reasons, all of which reflected the rapidly changing patterns of social and political life. The first horse race was held on 6 June 1827; the National Casino was organised following Széchenyi's plan that time; on 18 August the King sanctioned the act founding the Academy whose purpose was to codify the Hungarian language, and at the same time an act for appointing 'national deputations' (*deputationes regnicolaris*) to prepare bills for the upcoming parliamentary session was promulgated. The horse race and the Casino offered new spaces for masculine sociability and political discussion. The Academy responded to a long-standing request of the notables for the regulation of the Hungarian language through the commissioning of a monolingual dictionary, the standardisation of orthography, the publication of

a standard grammar and the formulation of a Hungarian vocabulary for administration and science. The setting up of national deputations suggested to contemporaries that the next parliamentary session would introduce a spirit of equitable judgement into the scrutiny of requests and grievances. The historical change anticipated by contemporaries now seems relatively insignificant; the horse race was a form of entertainment reserved for the elite, the Casino was also an exclusive club, and even there the members were not diligent enough to pay their dues; the Academy started its work only a few years later, in 1830; and the draft laws prepared by the deputations were opposed by the assemblies of the counties and never enacted.<sup>30</sup> In the moment, though, people felt that they were about to witness a great historical change in which the whole social system would be transformed, and Dessewffy was among them. He was a member of the national deputation, he took part in the work of the committee that formulated the basic rules of the National Casino, and he was among those who were invited by Archduke Joseph of Austria, the King's Palatine in Hungary, to discuss the structure of the Academy. Dessewffy threw himself into the politics and the social life of Pest.

In *Telling Time*, Stuart Sherman argues (using the example of Pepys' diaries), that the spread of early modern diary writing is related to the new tools for measuring time. Through the use of technical instruments such as the pocket watch or the pendulum,

he proposes, not only did the measurement of time become more accurate, but the approach to time itself changed, and the popularity of private diaries is a symptom of this turn. The earlier uncountable and incomprehensible minutes became countable and comprehensible and from the seventeenth century the slow and recurrent rhythms of the old devices (the 'tic-tock') was replaced by the monotonous and unbroken experience of passing time (the 'tick-tick-tick'). The fast and continuous return of the hours and the minutes and the new pulse of everyday life resulted in new literary forms, which served to fill the newly measured empty time: the change of chronometry paralleled the popularity of diary writing and epistolary novels and the emergence of daily periodicals. The literary task was no longer to narrate a story (even a 'true' history) from beginning to end, but instead the challenge was to join the stream of time at a suitable moment. People thus began to write about the time the new clocks were beating out. According to Sherman, in a diary 'occasioned time' and 'measured time' came into collision, and the diary presented a context for negotiating this tension because in a diary it was possible to include the uniqueness of a moment and the infinity of sequential moments simultaneously. As a matter of fact, the diary is presented by Sherman as the textual analogue of the diarist's (here Samuel Pepys') timing device. The text itself automatically assumes the functions of representing, narrating, telling, measuring and fixing time.<sup>31</sup>



Dessewffy's diary can certainly be read as a device for measuring time. As in Pepys' case, the first entries in Dessewffy's diary after his arrival in Pest record the order of the day, which is closely associated with protocols for preserving good health. He notes when he got out of bed, where he had lunch, what the weather was like, whether he was in a good mood, how cold he was, and how much wine he drank. These short summaries are recorded some time after the events, and the recorded events do not necessarily follow each other; their sequence depends on the way the different topics came into Dessewffy's mind. Here is the first entry, dated 22 January:

At 5 ½, when the meeting of the Deputatio was opened, the weather was quite foggy; in the Károlyi house,<sup>32</sup> a palace, there was a big long table, and on its green cover stood many iron candlesticks with two arms in which wax-candles burned *et vitae et mortis imago*[.]<sup>33</sup> I had lunch in the bigger [room of the] Casino, a bit of Eger wine proved beneficial for my digestion; we talked about how wine simmered with *pálinka*<sup>34</sup> never evaporates; someone suggested acquiring the Chaptal's book on the chemistry of apiculture;<sup>35</sup> I ate more than a bit, but not too much, my mood was middling; I felt my body neither in a joyful, but nor in a sad state; but I walked a bit today, because I didn't take pleasure either in sleeping, or in working; [I drank] coffee with milk and *aszú* wine.<sup>36</sup> I had two crescent rolls for breakfast at 10 o'clock, I had something of an appetite all the same. Yesterday at 12 o'clock I went to bed, I was shivering with cold, today in the morning I felt hot. The

urination wasn't going that well, although I slept in a cold room yesterday, and also the day before yesterday[,] I smoked more than I should have, I haven't had defecation today yet, I long for good and drinkable water, suddenly the fire was built up too much [by the staff of the hotel], my eyes did hurt. The wife of the Palatine left me a message not to kill my daughter Virginia. 'For heaven's sake' I am not blind as Appius was;<sup>37</sup> all at once the weather turned better and I found [myself] in two shirts, tight scarf and lined Atilla-coat,<sup>38</sup> I felt the draught, and my head was swimming, I felt too much cold in the unheated room, then I sweated a bit under the fur coat[,] (276–277)

The disregard of chronology, at first sight, is the exact opposite of the phenomenon described by Sherman. It results in a heap of things haphazardly thrown together. After Dessewffy mentions that he woke up, he talks about going to bed the day before, and between the description of his room the day before and the day of writing (it was unheated in both days) he inserts the message of the Palatine's wife about Dessewffy's daughter. The diversity of remarks about the author's physical state and other notes deserves attention. The meeting of the deputation is noted not because of the subjects under discussion, but because of the iron candlesticks, and all he tells us about the lunch in the Casino is the discussion about the right method of making pálinka and the recommendation of Jean-Antoine Chaptal's monograph. The order of everyday life occurs at several parallel and inseparable levels: his level of physical well-being and the advice which could be

useful in the future are noted together in Dessewffy's diary. The diary accordingly appears both as a device for constructing an order of the day and as a device for controlling the self. In the end, it is a symbolic treasury in which noteworthy and useful experiences can be preserved.

The next day (23 January) the Count made this entry: 'I had lunch at the Casino, I ate less than yesterday, I had very hard faeces, today as yesterday, I got up at half past 6 and I went to bed after 11, today the sky was less cloudy [than yesterday], and the weather was dry, colder and without fog; I was in good spirits' (277). The next day, on 24 January, there is an entry in the handwriting of his secretary: 'I had terrible defecation last night, I couldn't sleep a wink, I felt my insomnia very much. I received a sad letter from my wife after which I got very sad too; I made a number of visits by car, I did not walk enough' (278). And finally, the next day Dessewffy notes:

Last night I slept only a little and that badly, I feel very weak, my stomach isn't in a good state. The good water from the Orczys' garden couldn't cure it either, perhaps I ate and drank a bit more [than I should have], and I had a coffee at Szilasy's, with whom I had lunch. My natural good humour and sprightliness didn't come back [in spite of these things]. Perhaps it originates from the fact that yesterday I had a late dinner, while today I partook of some Ausbruch<sup>39</sup> with a crescent roll on an empty stomach. Today I was without kind feelings, perhaps I smoked too much (278–279).

This is the last of the dietetical entries; the diary goes on to record the moral and social life of the city. In the following few days Dessewffy visited the prominent personalities of the time, but he does not mention what or how much he ate, or what consequences it had on his digestion. He must have drunk wine, eaten crescent rolls, had coffee, smoked and had bowel movements, but he does not write a word about these physical pleasures. The manuscript is somewhat chaotic at the beginning, as the Count tries to control his days, his time, the space where he lives, and also the manuscript itself. He presumably stopped writing about his physical state because he had regained control over his daily schedule. There is no information about his digestion but certainly his other bodily functions were no longer a cause for concern. We have observed that the first two entries were recorded in the Count's hand, but after that he dictated his private secrets to his secretary. Yet in Dessewffy's practice it was not unique that he shared his corporal privacy and other elements of intimate sphere with a man who was not in the same class as him. It is more important that there is a functional distribution between the handwritings. Dessewffy wrote the first entries, the passages in which he gave an account of his new lifestyle in a new situation and he could design his new schedule, his physical and mental well-being in his own hand. After the first days he spent in Pest, it was no use to waste his time by writing himself, as his secretary

could take down the entries—using the first person as if it was Dessewffy's hand.

Five days are missing between 25 and 30 January. On the 30 January Dessewffy sums up the preceding five days without mentioning his diet. In the entry of 25 January we read 'perhaps I ate and drank a bit more, and I had a coffee at Szilasy's, with whom I had lunch'. In the following entry the same event is described slightly differently: 'Yesterday it was an excellent lunch at Count Gyóry's, the supremus comes [Lord Lieutenant] of Bács [County], and it was also very welcoming as well—Count Gyóry is a man of fashion, and eats, drinks and lives in a refined way' (279). Count Ferenc Gyóry (1774–1839) is the very opposite of the former Dessewffy: Gyóry lives 'in a refined way' in contrast to Dessewffy who suffers from the changing hot and cold temperature in his unheated room, and who is troubled by the immoderate consumption of different commodities. The diarist's discomfort disappears and the Lord of Bács stands before us as an example. It is not the diarist's own habits that we can see here, but the habits of others. These examples show the evolution of a perception about the 'right' mode of living. As the deadline of public duty draws closer, the narratives and anecdotes change their course. In the first entry, as we have seen, Dessewffy hardly mentioned the meeting of the national deputation. Later Széchenyi charges him with participation in the work of the com-

mittee which is preparing the regulations for the Casino. Dessewffy writes (or, more precisely, dictates) more (five pages) about this. The Academy's plan is described at the end of the text in detail. The public life of the self comes to the fore.<sup>40</sup>

### The Diary and Social Life

The diaries of Hungarian aristocrats can also be interpreted as socio-historical sources. Namely, at the end of the second decade in the nineteenth century the social life of the city was vibrant: the Casino opened its doors (Dessewffy, Wesselényi and Széchenyi, as their diaries prove, had their lunch there almost every day), the horse race began, balls and dinner parties galore. The 57-years-old Dessewffy was a bit too old to dance in a ball. Nevertheless, he attended the dance-balls of the *Judex Curiae Regiae* (head of the Supreme Court), Count Antal Cziráky (1772–1852) on 26 and 29 January. In addition, he participated in a ball in the smaller Casino room, in a ball of the palatine on 30 January, and on 7 February there was the civic ball of the Lutheran community. In a note he sums up the days that went by and he mentions another party held on 5 February and one of the Károlyi Family too. If one looks as a comparison into the diary of Wesselényi, one can see that the Baron regularly, almost every day turned up somewhere, and he mostly enjoyed himself till dawn.

Dessewffy was a real gentleman who was pleased about the events of his era, but who warned of their dangers. 'We are in

conversational balls almost every day. They begin at about 7 or 8 o'clock in the evening, and long till 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning. The perspired and exhausted youth has no corporal or spiritual power whatsoever. And, if they sleep all day long, the time, which could be used for more serious activity, is thrown away –' (286). Dessewffy's biggest fear was that his son, Aurél (1808–1842) could not avoid the company of friends who were 'still wet behind their ears':

My son Aurél mixes with bad sour cream company,<sup>41</sup> his friends are still wet behind their ears. True that he is invited to go, but nevertheless I suggested him not to neglect the company of lower classes. One rather suffers from indigestion by sour cream, than milk; there is no good in pushing yourself into the upper class companies, nor to be reluctant to be a guest of those; but one must see other peoples too, either to get a wider sense of mankind, or to avoid being suspected of envy and pride (283).

The dietetical-corporal comparison continues consciously. The social conversation can refine the manner and taste while being in uncultured company or carousing till dawn can easily corrupt the youth. As this 'corruption' can be easily experienced in the body (by perspiration and exhaustion), it also emerges in social life: this problem concerns the moderation of manners or, on the contrary, forgetting the golden mean. The activity of a social man (i.e. a gentleman) is not controlled by personal interest. Being

social provides not only the means of the personal and social promotion of the self, but it is also the ground where one can show his or her sparkling wit, and which is an opportunity to gather experience and increase intellectual knowledge. It is not an accident that the episodes inserted by Dessewffy often explore this ambiguity. Positive and negative examples of manners are in conflict with each other: on the one hand, we can read the examples of human fallibility, egoism and vanity, and on the other, of right, proper and refined life.

Countess Esterházy, who stayed in the tavern called 'Fortune', had an 'unfortunate' case: she had no proper clothes for the ball of the palatine, so she was forced to stay in her room with her husband and her admirers could not pay her their respects (283). On another occasion Széchenyi wore an ostentatious costume: 'he showed up as a minister of the Court wearing black stockings and several crosses on his chest' (281). The young Aurél Dessewffy was rebuked by a Baroness because he used some Slovak words (280). These episodes show us that loss of control could be interpreted as bad manners.

The positive examples have an ever-recurring narrative form: these stories end with a bon mot regularly. János Markovics (1785–1834) was very proud of his masculinity. He claimed to be 'a gifted man above others in the matter of love', so Count József Sigray (1768–1830) answered with a French libertine proverb to put Markovics to shame:



On ne bande plus à soizante ans,  
On ne fout plus, on est foutu (281)<sup>42</sup>

At another occasion, Dessewffy gave a witty answer to Széchenyi. When the latter complained about his aching calves ('only the Lords have muscular calves, because they always shake in the backseat of their chaises') Dessewffy replied that 'the trembling can make them lose weight from their calves at times, too'—i.e. the Lords tremble due to their fear, and not due to the bad road conditions (281). Finally, let me give a last example: a Countess did not allow Dessewffy to find a dance partner for her because 'she is not the one to look for a man'. Dessewffy's remark: 'later she looked for and hand-picked her dance partners for the roundel.' Of course, Dessewffy returned in order to inform her about his observation (281).

The amusement and dance provide only the surface of the social life. Dessewffy had conversations about politics and literature at the balls and dinners too: at the ball of the palatine he disputed the efficiency of the judiciary (he explains the palatine that British law is better than the Hungarian one, so it would be useful to adopt it—280–281), another time he has a row with Gábor Döbrentei (the first secretary of the Academy) and Baron Alajos Mednyánszky (1784–1844) (who was also a literary gentleman) about the right way of translating texts into Hungarian (Dessewffy does not expect faithfulness in translation, he would

rather insist on following ‘the spirit and originality of Hungarian language’—282).

The epithets (‘physical, moral and social’) in the title of Dessewffy’s diary are meaningful. When the diarist arrived in Pest, firstly he had to organise the daily routine of everyday life, then his diary gave us an analysis of moral and social life by reciting interesting anecdotes. In these entries the diary uses the same grammatical first person singular. But in fact not only did the text’s theme change, but the narrative form too. At first, this first person was working on constructing his self, then he became the narrator of stories about social life of the city. The text itself does not only record what Dessewffy lived through, but also a kind of progress. The zenith of this evolution is the point when the self steps on the stage of politics: on 11 March the patriots, who took the trouble to construct the plan of the Academy, assembled at our writer’s home (an apartment in a hotel), and Dessewffy was asked by them to deliver a speech in front of the ‘praeses’ (i.e. the President) of the Academy. The description of the scene is worthy of note again. Due to his rank the speech should have been given by Bishop János Horváth (1769–1835), and it is curious that the speech was made by a laic nobleman. But Horváth was late, and by the time he arrived, it was already decided that the orator would be Dessewffy (who had already rehearsed his speech in front of the others by that time). Horváth was so offended that he even left the company. Nevertheless, it was a good occasion

for Dessewffy to show how refined a gentleman he was: he suggested the committee that they go to the Primate (i.e. the head of the Hungarian Catholic Church), so that Horváth could give the speech before his own principal. His main argument was that a pontificate could give a helping hand (money) to the Academy: 'I added that I am not enthusiastic about religion, as the whole country knows it well anyway; I whispered in the ears of several desperate men a quote by Iamblicus: *Aegyptii, et feles, et Vulpes & Crocodilos adorabant ne nocerent*;<sup>43</sup> they agreed at last, but only on the condition that we visit the four Founders [of the Academy] first' (289).<sup>44</sup> Thus, the social manner of a gentleman gains the upper hand in the conflict between two individuals, and due to his stoic ethics, the inner self yields to the representative function.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

Dessewffy's diary presents us with a written self adapted to numerous spheres of life, and we can trace the varying functions that the work of writing had in constructing that self in the multiple and overlapping milieus in which he operated. He began by giving shape to his daily routine. In this phase the diary itself was an instrument by which the diarist could manage his everyday practices, such as nutrition, sleeping, daily schedule, physical and mental state. This is why Dessewffy, who really preferred not to write in his own hand, took these entries down himself. In the

second phase, the diarist as one of the prominent politicians of his era became a participant in the social life of Pest. Here, Dessewffy abandoned writing himself, and instead dictated interesting anecdotes in which the right behaviour of the perfect gentleman was described. The secretary who took down these short stories was himself part of that world. In those pages the diary—and accordingly the practice of writing—changes its function; it becomes a tool for adapting the world to one's own needs and at the same time training oneself for active membership in a new polity. It is noteworthy that in this phase the diarist was not usually the protagonist of the story he told, nor did the events recorded in the diary seem to be particularly important. Finally, in a third phase the self went onto the stage of politics. The diarist became the protagonist of political events that he understood as historically significant.

The diary of Dessewffy is not only a document of a historical turning point but also a text which shows how an agent of the long eighteenth century constructed himself as an agent in writing, and how he interpreted his transition into new forms of social co-existence. In this article I have tried to demonstrate the ambiguity of diary-keeping by analysing a particular text. It shows, on the one hand, how a private self organises their everyday life, and on the other hand, how it apprehends the social structures around themselves. In Dessewffy's case we can observe this paradox: by writing and dictating entries he creates the self

of the diary-keeper who is getting to know the new and unfamiliar conditions of his life and living up to the ideal of the perfect gentleman. At the end of the text, the Count appears as an incarnated example of the idol he created earlier. Thus, in diary-keeping the practice of writing is a method of creating selves, and also an important means to convert the perception of particular experiences into practice at a higher level. In this way a private literary praxis can be understood as the indirect mode of social life, and vice versa, the social habits of the early nineteenth-century Hungarian elite can be considered as the consequence of everyday writing practice.

## NOTES

- 1 For the dilemma of continuity or discontinuity in Hungarian history between the two centuries see Moritz von Csaky, *Von der Aufklärung zum Liberalismus: Studien zum Frühliberalismus in Ungarn*, Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Geschichte Österreichs, 10 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), pp. 235–46; Károly Kecskeméti, *Le Hongrie et le reformisme liberal: Problemes politiques et sociaux 1790–1848*, Fonti e studi di storia moderna e contemporanea, 1 (Rome: Il Centro di Ricerca, 1989), pp. 199–234; Gábor Vermes, *Hungarian Culture and Politics in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1711–1848* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), pp. 153–212.
- 2 For his career in the context of historical anthropology Gábor Varderna, *Élet és irodalom: Az irodalom társadalmi használata gróf Dessewffy József életművében* [Life and Literature: The Social Use of Literature in the Oeuvre of Count József Dessewffy] (Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2013).
- 3 It is cited by Sándor Takáts, ‘A posta a kémrendszer szolgálatában’ [‘The Post in Service of Secret Police’], in Id., *Kémvilág Magyarországon* [The World of Spies in Hungary] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1980), pp. 64–78 (p. 71).

- 4 Crescence Seilern (1799–1875) – an Austrian lady who was the unhappy wife of Count Károly Zichy at that time. After Zichy’s death, in 1836 Széchenyi married her.
- 5 For Széchenyi’s person in the context of the diaries R. J. W. Evans, ‘Széchenyi and Austria’, in *History and Biography: Essays in Honour of Derek Beales*, ed. by T. C. W. Blanning and David Cannadine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 113–41.
- 6 ‘Wesselényi, nach einigen siebenbürgischen Fachsen, die ich im Herzen missbilligte, recht krank geworden.’ *Gróf Széchenyi István naplói* [*The diaries of Count István Széchenyi*], ed. by Gyula Vizsota, 6 vols, (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1925–1939), III (1932), p. 198.
- 7 The volumes of Wesselényi’s diary (more than 1500 pages!) are in Kolozsvár (today: Cluj Napoca, Romania), in the Arhivele Naționale Direcția Județeană Cluj. I read them in the National Archives of Hungary on microfilm: *Ifj. Wesselényi Miklós naplója* [*The Diary of Miklós Wesselényi jr.*], Budapest, National Archives of Hungary, Microfilm Collection, 5495 On the manuscripts, see József Venczel, *Ifjabb Wesselényi Miklós személyi levéltára* [*The Private Archive of Miklós Wesselényi jr.*] (Kolozsvár [Cluj Napoca]: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2002).
- 8 For the notion ‘Central Europe’, see R. J. W. Evans, ‘Central Europe: The History of An Idea’, in Id., *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs: Essays on Central Europe, c. 1683–1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 293–304.

- 9 Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); Id., *On Diary*, ed. by Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. by Katherine Durnin (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).
- 10 On the Protestant roots of documenting and collecting see William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1938), pp. 96–100.
- 11 Margo Todd, 'Puritan Self-Fashioning: The Diary of Samuel Ward', *Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992), 236–264; the edition of his diary: *The Diary of Samuel Ward, a Translator of the 1611 King James Bible*, transcribed and prepared by Dr. M. M. Knappen, ed. by John W. Cowart (Jacksonville: Bluefish Books, 2007); Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985); Alan Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: A Seventeenth-Century Clergyman: An Essay in Historical Anthropology* (New York: Norton, 1977); the edition of his diary: *The Diary of Ralph Josselin, 1616–1683*, ed. by Alan Macfarlane (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).
- 12 Harry Berger Jr., 'The Pepys Show: Ghost-Writing and Documentary Desire in The Diary', *English Literary History* 65 (1998), 557–91 (pp. 557–58); Mark S. Dawson, 'Histories and Texts: Refiguring the Diary of Samuel Pepys', *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000), 407–31 (pp. 410–12); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York – Hagerstown – San Francisco – London: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 245, 267. The edition of the diaries: *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A New and Complete Transcription*, ed. by Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols (London: Bell & Hymen, 1970–1983).



- 13 Lotte Mulligan, 'Self-Scrutiny and the Study of Nature: Robert Hooke's Diary as Natural History', *The Journal of British Studies* 35 (1996), 311–42. The edition of his diary: *The Diary of Robert Hooke, 1672–1680*, ed. by Henry Robinson and Walter Adams (London: Taylor & Francis, 1935) (repr. London: Wykeham, 1968).
- 14 For the digital editions of some diaries [www.gyulaynaplok.hu](http://www.gyulaynaplok.hu).
- 15 For definitions of the notion 'sensibility', see Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 5–48.
- 16 *Mindennapi. Horvát István pest-budai naplója 1805–1809* [*On Every Day. The Diary of István Horvát in Pest-Buda, 1805–1809*], ed. by Alfréd Temesi and Mária Szauder (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1967).
- 17 J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 4–7.
- 18 H. Porter Abbott, *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 19.
- 19 Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 58.
- 20 *Ibid.* pp. 6–11.
- 21 Although he has been seriously criticised for that: Berger, 'The Pepys Show', pp. 561–67; James Grantham Turner, 'Pepys and the Private Parts of Monarchy', in *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration*:

- Literature, Drama, History*, ed. by Gerald MacLean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 95–110.
- 22 For the diarist's 'solitude', see Maurice Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), pp. 19–20.
- 23 In diaries it can often be seen that the diarists recorded things they were quite familiar with, as though they were curiosities. This supports a view that Pepys wrote his text not for himself, but for posterity, as a memoir; see Cecil S. Emden, *Pepys Himself* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 142. Others may apprehend the same phenomenon in a different way: 'The writing of the diary was a conscious but complexly reflexive process': Dawson, 'Histories and Texts', p. 418. For Evelyn: *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. by William Bray, 2 vols (New York and London: M. Walter Dunne, 1901).
- 24 R. J. W. Evans, 'The Politics of Language and the Languages of Politics: Latin and the Vernaculars in Eighteenth-Century Hungary', in *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Hamish Scott and Brendan Simms (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 200–24. For the difficult question of language in the context of the Habsburg Monarchy Id., 'Language and State-building: The Case of the Habsburg Monarchy', *Austrian History Yearbook* 35 (2004), pp. 1–24.
- 25 He was the tutor of the diarist Lajos Gyulay at the time.
- 26 Ferenc Teleki to Gábor Döbrentei, Paszmos [today: Posmuş, Romania], 15 November 1815, in *Gróf Teleki Ferencz' versei, 's néhány leveleiből töredékek* [*The Poems by Ferenc Teleki and Some Fragments from his Correspondence*], ed. by Gábor Döbrentei (Buda: Magyar Királyi Egylet, 1834), pp. 215–21 (p. 220).

- 27 In Hungarian law the House of Commons first debated what were called grievances (in Latin: *gravamen*), and then the House of Lords discussed the proposals to decide whether they were appropriate to be sent to the King. In this process of negotiation, by the turn of the nineteenth century the lower house had become the more important scene of politics because grievances could only be articulated there. Being a member of this house implied more power and some influence on current policy. For the history of the Hungarian Diet, see Jean Bérenger and Károly Kecskeméti, *Parlement et vie parlementaire en Hongrie, 1608–1918* (Paris: H. Champion, 2005). For the eighteenth century Diet, see István Szijártó, *A diéta: A magyar rendek és az országgyűlés, 1708–1792* [*The Diet: The Estates and the Parliament of Hungary, 1708–1792*] (Budapest: Osiris, 2005). For the main theses of the latter István Szijártó, ‘The Diet: The Estates and the Parliament of Hungary, 1708–1792’ in *Bündnispartner und Konkurrenten des Landesfürsten? Die Stände in der Habsburgermonarchie*, ed. by Gerhard Ammerer, William D. Godsey Jr., Martin Scheutz, Peter Urbanitsch and Alfred Stefan Weiss (Vienna and Munich: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), pp. 151–71.
- 28 The well-known poet, Dániel Berzsenyi (1776–1836) once said of this practice: ‘Actually, true friends can see each other in letters.’ Cited in a letter from Pál Szemere to Ferenc Kazinczy, Pest, 27 April 1810, in *Kazinczy Ferencz levelezése. Hetedik kötet. 1809. Október 1. – 1810. Junius 30.* [*The Correspondence of Ferenc Kazinczy: Vol. VII: From 1 October 1809 to 30 June 1810*], ed. by János Váczy (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1896), pp. 398–408 (p. 407).
- 29 Budapest, National Széchényi Library of Hungary, Manuscript Collection, Analekta 10.825. I have recently published the text: Gábor

Vaderna, 'Gróf Dessewffy József pesti útinaplója 1828-ból' ['The Travel Diary of Count József Dessewffy in 1828'], *Lymbus. Magyarországtudományi Forrásközlemények* [*Lymbus. Annual Yearbook of Hungarianology*], ed. Lengyel Réka and Gábor Ujváry (Budapest: [n. pub.], 2014), pp. 275–92. (Henceforward I will put the page references in parentheses in the main text.)

- 30 On the latter see Kecskeméti, *Le Hongrie et le reformisme liberal*, pp. 199–203.
- 31 Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries and English Diurnal Forms, 1660–1785* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 91.
- 32 The meeting was held in the Palace of Count György Károlyi. (Now it is the building of the Petőfi Literary Museum Budapest.)
- 33 As an image of both life and death.
- 34 Pálinka is a sort of brandy in Hungary.
- 35 Jean-Antoine Chaptal (1756–1832), French chemist. The work that Dessewffy mentioned: M. le Comte Chaptal, *Chimie appliquée à l'Agriculture* (Paris: Madame Huzard, 1823).
- 36 Aszú is a special, strong Hungarian wine.
- 37 Dessewffy named his daughter Virginia after the Roman Virginius' daughter. The decemvir Appius Claudius tried to rape her, but Virginius, to protect her, killed the girl before it could happen.
- 38 Hungarian coat, national costume of the era.
- 39 The German word for aszú wine.

- 40 Although the smaller events of everyday life are rarely mentioned in the text, and instead the analysis of social life is emphasised, the traces of the everyday are still visible. For example, on 1 February: 'I saw at his place [i.e. in Széchenyi's hotel room] such a wooden washtub that resembles an overturned hat case.' (283).
- 41 In the Hungarian original 'sour cream company' is used in the sense of 'immature' or 'childish'.
- 42 'At the age of sixty there is no erection / We cannot fuck, we are fucked.'
- 43 Iamblichus (cc. 245–cc. 325)—neo-platonic philosopher. The Latin saying presumably originates from Herodotus and several early modern variants can be found with different animals and from different sources. 'The Egyptians adored cats, foxes and crocodiles so that these animals do not harm them.'
- 44 The 'four Founders' were the main sponsors of the Academy: Count István Széchenyi, Count György Andrassy (1797–1872), Count György Károlyi (1802–1877) and Count Ábrahám Vay (1789–1855).
- 45 It is not the only entry in which we can study Dessewffy's particular approach to religion. When he listens to a sermon in church, he concentrates on the 'finesse of the speech', and he attaches the religious practice to an aesthetised lifestyle (280).