Edit Zsadányi

Gendered Narrative Subjectivity

Some Hungarian and American Women Writers

PL ACADEMIC RESEARCH

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Gendered Narrative Subjectivity

This book wants to make Hungarian women writers accessible to an English-speaking public and presents interpretations of Hungarian and American literary texts by writers such as Margit Kaffka, Anna Lesznai, Jolán Földes, Zsuzsa Rakovszky, Agáta Gordon, Virág Erdős, Zsuzsa Forgács, Alaine Polcz, Gertrude Stein, Kathy Acker and Jhumpa Lahiri. In literary narratives it is possible to represent female political interests in a decentered narrative subjectivity. The book illustrates that literary narratives readily accept the contradictory nature of identity issues and create an exciting and complex network of articulating female voices.

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'Impersonal Narration in the Prose of Margit Kaffka, Emma Ritoók and Jolán Földes'

AHEA: E-journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association, 4/18 (2011). http://ahea.net/e-journal/volume-4-2011/18

'Displacement of Identity in Kathy Acker's Don Quixote and Gertrude Stein's Three Lives'. in Joyce Goggin and Sonja Neef, eds., *Traveling Concepts* (Amsterdam: ASCA Press, 2001, 54–63.

'Seech from the Margin. Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* and Agáta Gordon's: *Kecskerúzs*' *Hungarian Studies* 15/2 (2001) 127–143.

'The Beauty of Details: The Rewriting of Omnipotent Narrative Tradition in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Namesake*' in Asha Choubey, ed., *Women on Women: Women Writers' Perspectives on Women*. (Jaipur: Aadi Publications, 2011), 25–39.

Introduction

This book is about contradictions, or rather the positive possibilities arising from contradictions, and its purpose is to show how contradictions between postmodern and feminist conceptions of the subject – that have been debated since the 1980's – do not manifest themselves in the works of women writers as mutually exclusive ideologies. On the contrary, contradictions between the united feminist and the disunited postmodernist concepts of subjectivity are an important, exciting and constructive part of narrative feminine identities.

The book contains comparative and intercultural interpretations of Hungarian and American literary texts by female writers and adopts an intercultural perspective to examine the issue of representing feminine identities in decentered narrative constructions. The main thesis of my book is that in literary narrative it is possible to represent female political interest (that presupposes a strong and united concept of subjectivity) in a decentered narrative subjectivity. In other words, the theoretical contradiction between maintaining centered and decentered concepts of subjectivity at the same time functions as a constructive element (and not a logical contradiction) in certain narratives written by women writers. Based on this theoretical contradiction, I will illustrate that literary narratives readily accept the contradictory nature of identity issues and create an exciting and complex network of articulating female voices.

Apart from the theoretical and narratological argumentation, the book also responds to the growing interest in Hungarian writers in the English-speaking world. Works of major Hungarian novelists, such as Péter Esterházy, László Krasznahorkai, Péter Nádas, György Dragomán and the Nobel-laurate Imre Kertész have gained significant international attention. The other purposes of this book are to extend this list and to make some works by twentieth century and contemporary Hungarian women writers accessible to a wider, English-speaking public. I also engage in intercultural mediation as I interpret these novels in the Hungarian cultural context from the perspective of international literary theoretical trends. Finally, from a feminist-narratological point of view, I intend to illustrate in the following chapters that gender based narrative subjectivity cannot be limited to the figures of the narrator and the character, or to their speech and thoughts. Instead, it is formed in the textual and rhetorical matrix of the text and forms of cooperative readership. I suggest in my readings that when examining constructs of their (feminine) subjectivity, we should take into account not only the narrative appearance of united subjects such as the voice,

represented thoughts and the personality of a female character or narrator, but also other signs of a decentered subjectivity emerging elsewhere in the text. I distinguished several narrative-rhetorical figures that are characteristic and often occurring ones, such as enumeration, omission, chiasmus, detailed description, and projecting feelings onto objects. Also, conflict between story and discourse or between cultural and fictional narratives are able to bring together centered and decentered notions of the female subject.

The first part of the book (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) provides a concise overview of the theoretical and literary historical developments by using modernist and contemporary literary works and excerpts as illustrations of the key arguments. Doing so it wishes to represent a component of Hungarian literature from a feminist point of view. The second part (Chapters 4, 5, and 6) offers more detailed analyses of entire texts. It primarily pursues comparative studies, thus puts Hungarian modernist and postmodernist works by female writers into an intercultural context.

Chapter 1 gives a brief survey of the key issues and concepts of gendered narrative subjectivity as it is raised in feminist criticism and postmodern theories. It addresses the conflicting relationship between representing gender difference from a united position of the subject and the disunited postmodernist concept of the subject as they appear in narrative texts. This chapter wishes to weave together three relating concepts: gender difference in articulating female voices and interest; issues of decentered subjectivity and finally, feminist aspects of narrativity.

Chapter 2 and 3 outline narrative rhetorical figures in several works by Hungarian modernist and postmodernist female writers. Instead of the speech or thoughts of the character, I identify several narrative figures that express united and disunited notions of gendered subjectivities at the same time. I bring examples by female authors to widen the scope of Hungarian literature represented abroad.

Chapter 2 investigates narrative rhetorical tropes in the works of some Hungarian modernist writers that express peculiarities of femininity. Referring to feminist scholars Griselda Pollock and Rita Felski, I examine instances and possible interpretations of female subjectivity such as the rhetoric of enumeration, overlapping cultural and fictional narratives and the projection of feminine subjectivity onto objects in the works of Hungarian modernists such as Margit Kaffka, Emma Ritoók, Jolán Földes, Cecile Tormay and Anna Lesznai.

In Chapter 3 I analyze contemporary Hungarian literature in order to see how feminine prose is able to project a solid yet fragmented subjectivity as well as both affirm and reject the possibility of a particular feminine language. Examining the ruptures and omissions in the language of prose, I search for the remains or traces of the erasure of alternative feminine perspectives that do not fit into oppositional

conceptions. What remains allows the reader to face this lack and create a discursive space that is able to voice lost female voices. I focus on the manifestations of femininity and subordination in the prose of Virág Erdős, Zsuzsa Forgács, Viktória Köves, Alaine Polcz, Zsuzsa Rakovszky, Margit Halász and Noémi Szécsi.

In Chapter 4 I discuss *Three Lives* by Gertrude Stein and *Don Quixote* by Kathy Acker to examine how rejecting a self-realizing humanist subject may still create a space for silenced and marginalized female voices and how the representation of women's interests may be coupled with a decentered subjectivity. For instance, *Three Lives* questions the narrative tradition of progress governed by the subject while the characters of *Don Quixote* are contradictory mounds of text that create a differently conceived narrative process through constant contradictions.

In Chapter Five I read a contemporary Hungarian author from an American modernist writer's perspective. I examine the correlations of women's writing and feminine identity in one of the most typical works of modernity, *Tender Buttons* by Gertrude Stein and in *Goat Rouge* [Kecskerúzs] by the Hungarian author, Agáta Gordon. Following postmodern feminist theories, I examine the process where the free interplay of signifiers allows the texts to voice a particular type of femininity marginalized by Western culture. This voicing in Stein's case is also meant in the literal sense of the word as vocal elements are amplified in the textual space. Similarly to *Tender Buttons,* Agáta Gordon's *Goat Rouge* [Kecskerúzs] is one of the literary works that highlight the rhetorics of the text and then tie this emphasis to a particular marginalized manifestation where the rhetorical relations of the text constantly prevent the reader from drawing a self-identical and coherent self-image.

Finally in Chapter 6, reversing the line of comparison, I interpret a contemporary American novel through a Hungarian modernist work. I will discuss Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* focusing on the issue of personal and collective narrative identity as it is formulated in the Hungarian context and translation. Understanding subjectivity as multiple and contradictory, I intend to illustrate that *The Namesake* recalls and recycles the tradition of omniscient narration which was employed by the realist fiction. The narrative mode of the Russian author, Nikolai Gogol is evoked and the reader is invited to comprehend *The Namesake* in the intertextual context of his prose fiction. Lahiri's narrative that focuses on the peculiarities of personal life is able to describe the process of assimilation and dissimilation. In the last part of this chapter and the final part of my book, I will compare *The Namesake* with the Hungarian novel *The Street of the Fishing Cat* [Halászó macska uccája] by Jolán Földes, which uses a similar narrative technique of detailed description for communicating the everyday life struggle of an immigrant Hungarian family living in Paris in the twenties.

Chapter 1: Subjectivity, Narrativity and Gender Identity

In the last few decades, humanist conceptions of the subject that promoted the idea of a self-identical, united and autonomous individual have been questioned from a variety of perspectives by different theories. These theories share the same premise of assuming a linguistically and culturally constructed subject, such as poststructuralist theories which speak of the constructive nature of identity categories and an inherently, ideologically and textually determined decentered subject. These theories also highlight different aspects of the latter. For instance, psychoanalytical approaches call attention to the operation of unconscious desires that strongly influence human thought processes and action, inevitably resulting in contradictions, while philosophical hermeneutics talks of the precedence of language and the universal nature of linguistic world-experience. Cultural-philosophical theories emphasize that not only are human thought processes the products of ideologies and prevalent discourses, but also that even the most contradictory concepts may coexist in human cognition.

In her book *The Posthuman,* Rosi Braidotti sees posthuman theories as a further development after the postmodern views. The notion of the *posthuman* seems to her the most adequate concept for coming to terms with our globally linked and technologically mediated societies. She considers the theoretical tendencies after postmodernism and poststructuralism and creates an itinary in the intellectual development that leads from humanism through antihumanism to posthumanism. In her view, the poststructuralist continental philosophers, the feminist and the postcolonial thinkers can be considered as representing the anti-humanist turn, in which they challenged the unitary and humanist notion of the subject with its Eurocentric core and imperial tendencies. They rejected the classical definition of European identity in terms of Humanism, rationality and the universal. Their stance was not merely in opposition to Humanism, but they created other visions of the self, too. Braidotti proposes an affirmative and critical posthuman position that builds on the anti-humanist legacy and moves further (2013: 38). In her opinion 'a posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including the non-human or "earth others"' (49). I hope that the central problem of my book about the coexistence of a postmodernist decentered subjectivity and feminist ideas of centered subjectivity still remains relevant from the posthumanist position advocated by Rosi Braidotti, since the posthumanist notion of subjectivity preserves

the non-unitary character of the postmodernist, in Braidotti's term antihumanist, subject. I believe that the creative tension between unitary and non-unitary subjectivity, which I study in this book in the works of female writers, may have relevance in an age that advances the postmodern conditions.

Conceptions of the decentered subject have raised new problems as well as new issues for many studies, for example narrative theories and feminist criticism, two fields that previously presupposed a traditional self-identical, self-exploring and self-realizing subject and were prompted by the results of postmodern theories to reconsider their basic tenets. For instance, conceptions of the decentered subject question the most fundamental categories of classical narratology such as the figure of the character or even the narrator, which in turn questioned the authority of the author and the idea of a coherent authorial horizon. In the case of feminist theories, focus on the centered subject was primarily due to an emancipatory interest; postmodern subjectivity thus created unresolved tension and sparked countless debates within the ranks of feminist criticism. Perhaps the most important difference between feminist criticism and postmodern theories lies in their conceptions of the subject. Inasmuch as it represents the interests of women, feminist criticism (which is itself a part and product of postmodern approaches) has no choice but to presuppose a well-defined subjectivity and call attention to women's interests. That is why the aim of this book is to demonstrate how, in the prose of the women writers I analyzed, the theoretical contradictions between postmodern and feminist conceptions of the subject manifest themselves not as mutually exclusive ideas, but rather as contradictions. These contradictions are an important constitutive element of a particular feminine construction of identity.

At first I will briefly introduce some basic ideas relating to the notion of disunited subjectivity, then I will discuss this issue from the perspective of feminist criticism and narrative theory, providing a short summary of some of the most important arguments of academic literature within these interrelated fields. Finally, I will discuss my own thoughts on the subject, primarily the claim that feminine narrative subjectivity should not be imagined as an entity or a conglomerate of attributes, but rather as a constantly evolving matrix that emphasizes openness and incorporates contradictions and paradoxes. Likewise, the co-creative role of the reader should be considered an integral part of this matrix. The following chapters devoted to the interpretation of literary works by women writers will serve to support this argument.

The Decentered Subject

Many comprehensive overviews have been written on the topic of decentered subjectivity; therefore, I will limit myself to a few basic tenets of the most prominent postmodern conceptions of the subject. As we know, Freud's psychoanalytic framework is the first to propose a subject that is no longer the only agent in the production of meaning. He was followed by Lacan, who combined linguistics with psychoanalysis and promoted a subject that is subordinated to the operations of linguistic signifiers. In his theory, desire drives the subject towards newer and newer objects of desire and hence towards newer and newer signifiers while the referent – the signified – remains unobtainable. Lacan's theory on the linguistically constructed subject thus supports the decentering of individual consciousness, which means that this consciousness can no longer be considered an original source of meaning, knowledge or action. Lacan argues that a young child has no consciousness of identity and is unable to consider itself a separate unit from the 'other', i.e. everything that lies beyond it. However, as a result of the 'mirror stage' in the child's development, upon looking at itself in the mirror, it comes to 'recognize' itself as separate from the outside world. This 'recognition' is nothing more than identifying with an 'imagined', unified and autonomous self. However, the child can only become a complete subject by entering language, and in order to eventually enter the society in which it was born, the child must enter the symbolic order, the signifying systems of culture, the most important of which is language. If the child wants to speak, it needs to differentiate – to be able to speak about itself, it needs to distinguish 'I' from 'you'. In order to express its needs, the child also needs to identify with the first person singular, which is the very basis of subjectivity. Eventually, the child comes to recognize itself in a variety of subject positions (as male or female, as a 'boy' or a 'girl') from which discourse becomes intelligible to it and to others. 'Identity' or subjectivity then is no more than a web or matrix of subject positions in which the different positions do not necessarily correspond to one another – in fact, they may even be contradictory (Belsey 1991: 595–6).[1] As Catherine Belsey concludes from Lacan's theory, subjectivity is linguistically and discursively constructed and constantly shifts along a chain of discourses (18).

According to Emile Benveniste, the possibility of subjectivity is created in language, which allows us to mark ourselves as 'I', the subject of the utterance. People

1 I used Catherine Belsey's essay for my overview of the basic concepts of Lacan. Catherine Belsey, 'Constructing the Subject, Deconstructing the Text' in Robyn Warhol, Diane Price eds., *Feminisms – An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 595–6.

thus create and constitute themselves as subjects through language where consciousness can only exist through opposition and distinction: the 'I' cannot be understood without the concept of 'not I' or 'you'. As Emile Benveniste (1971: 225) points out, the subject is purely linguistic because it is through the categories of 'I' and 'not I' available exclusively in language that the individual is able to establish relations that allow it to reflect upon itself as a homogenous entity separate from the outside world. Moreover, language only functions this way because the speakers present themselves as subjects by referring to themselves in discourse as 'I'.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's well-known approach states that language use as a process is not controlled by the conscious choices of the individual; in other words, it is not us who speak a language – it is the language that speaks us. The primary importance of language does not lie in grammar or the lexicon but in speaking what has been said in tradition, thereby simultaneously appropriating and interpreting those traditions (1984: 321). Gadamer also develops Humboldt's thesis that language-views are also world-views. He highlights that according to Humboldt, language has a separate existence from a given individual who belongs to a certain linguistic community, and if the individuals grow up in that language, they will be introduced into a defined system of relations and behavior (308). However, unlike Humboldt who emphasizes the multiplicity of linguistic worlds, Gadamer chooses to highlight the universal aspect of language that voices the entirety of our system of relations. The way we view ourselves and the world is preserved in language, and language allows us to see what lies beyond the consciousness of each individual. For instance, from the way certain words change, we can discern how morals and values change over time. Gadamer concludes that language is capable of this precisely because it is not the product of reflexive thinking but rather language itself realizes the system of relations we live in. In other words, the world manifests itself through language (312).

Similarly to hermeneutics, deconstructionist views emphasize the primacy of the tropological movement of language over the formation of the concept of the subject. According to the well-known theory of Jacques Derrida, the human subject is subordinated to the signifying mechanisms of language and the processes arising from the continuous postponement of *writing*. The concept of the subject is also created as a result of the movement of an all-preceding *différance*. Continuing the argumentation of Saussure (1966), Derrida argues that language is nothing but differences and is therefore not a function of the speaking subject. This leads Derrida to conclude that the subject is written into language as a function of the language and can only become a speaking subject if its discourse adheres to the rule system of language that is itself a system of differences (Derrida 1998).

In the chapter 'Abstractions' of Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, Paul de Man examines the relationship of language and subjectivity. According to de Man, in this chapter Condillac basically tells the story of the subject or the self-establishing consciousness. Condillac starts by making a distinction between *reality* or objects existing in themselves from *true reality*, which is created by the consciousness based on these objects. In a sense, *true reality* is triumph over the objects that are appropriated by the subject, and this aggressive behavior of the subject is due to this act being the only available method of establishing itself. To summarize de Man's detailed analysis, the subject is similar to objects inasmuch as it is devoid of existence in itself and is created as a reflection upon the objects, and objects and *true reality* share this same negativity and are created by the subject. This illusory similarity allows the possibility of substitutions through which the consciousness or the subject becomes a central metaphor, the metaphor of metaphors; consequently, the most important metaphor will be the consciousness as a metaphor of the subject. Paul de Man thus concludes that Condillac's metaphorical and theoretical discussion is nothing more than the autobiographical narration of the creation of the subject, which is threatening in the sense that the concept of the subject is written into the narration itself (1997: 42–6).

Althusser's views (1971) are especially influential among contemporary researchers. He was the first to attempt linking the internal psychic preconditions of the subject with the operation of social and power practices, which means that subsequent psychoanalytic approaches are just as invested in his theories as research that focuses on the social phenomena of marginalization. For example, Althusser's ideas play an important role in contemporary feminist theories or contemporary theories examining the issues of homosexuality. According to Althusser, the subject is constructed in language and discourse, but since the symbolic sign system is closely linked to ideology, the subject is created by ideology. In other words, the role of ideology is to turn individuals into subjects: people (falsely) recognize themselves by the way ideology hails them as subjects, calling them by their names in exchange for 'recognizing' their autonomy (1971: 169). Recognizing ourselves as autonomous subjects is thus an ideological construct that operates by hiding its own ideological and discursive subject-constructing nature.

By comparing the theories of Althusser and Lacan, Catherine Belsey points out the paradox that, while the subject is a site of contradictions and remains in a constant process of transformation, bourgeois ideology nonetheless hails individuals as fixed identities. In the view of popular psychology or popular sociology, we possess essential characteristics and the deepest, ultimate constant behind them

is 'human nature'. In contrast, Belsey argues that the subject is a contradictory and constantly changing process where subjectivity is continuously repositioned in the chain of discourses, resulting in a whole new range of potentially incompatible positions that allow the subject to grasp itself and its relations with reality. According to Belsey, women as a social group are especially characterized by being created and constrained by contradictory discourses. Women simultaneously participate in the discourses of liberty, self-creation and the liberal-humanist discourse of rationality, and at the same time are placed by society in specifically feminine discourses of subordination, relative incapability and irrational intuition. One would be hard pressed to find a united and coherent subject position within these contradictory discourses, let alone attempt to establish completely consistent patterns of behavior based on that premise (1991: 599–60).

Kaja Silverman (1992) attempts to expand Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation with psychoanalytic and anthropological theories in order to highlight the complex and subtle cooperation between the subject and the operation of social ideologies as well as the relationship between social production and the system of signifiers. Interpellation is the process whereby ideology and the institutions of ideology hail and then categorize individuals in a certain system of relations. According to Silverman, Althusser was the pioneer of her preferred line of research when he talked of a certain unity, the special connection between individual and society that Silverman comes to refer to as 'ideological belief'. Ideological belief creates the illusory unity of society and the ego that constructs a social 'reality' through which the subject arrives at a certain normative identity. Silverman argues that while ideologies are maintained in society through collective beliefs, the individual belief is an important element that concerns the deepest layers of the human psyche; therefore, these beliefs can only be approached through psychoanalysis. According to Althusser, ideologies expect people to believe and present certain things as evident. This led him to trace the persuasive power of ideologies in rudimentary, automatic human activities rather than statements, the logic of argumentation, facts or consciously conceived ideas. He refers to Pascal's well-known thesis that the automatism of kneeling and praying leads to religion; Silverman thus concludes that in Althusser's view, ideological belief operates outside the conscious but within the psyche. It is often thought even among scholars of Althusser that ideological interpellation only begins to operate at a stage when the individual has already passed the stages of parental identification. In contrast, Silverman argues and systematically proves that ideology penetrates one's personality as early as before the oedipal period and influences the formation process of the ego. Consequently, ideologies also strongly

influence the unconscious desires that our whole psychic reality is based upon, which means that an ideology may influence an individual even when the individual consciously distances itself from the ideology (Silverman 1992: 20–22).

Subjectivity, Language and Feminist Criticism

Many feminist scholars agree that the primary cultural means of asserting masculine social oppression and dominance over femininity is language (which is a multi-faceted system of discourses). Feminist criticism does not attempt to hide its own ideological implications. It focuses on women's perspectives and interests, and therefore, just like any other ideological framework, it inevitably constructs the position of the subject – to speak as a woman or speak for women is inseparable from the issues and politics of identity. However, it is somewhat problematic that just as the subject position comes to be occupied by women, postmodern theoretical systems reach the stage of questioning the concept of the subject itself. In the words of Judith Butler, one often hears that right now, just as women begin to occupy subject positions, postmodern views reach the conclusion that the subject is dead. Some consider this a conspiracy against women and other oppressed groups that have just begun to speak for themselves (1995: 43).

Feminism and postmodernism erase the boundaries between the categories of high and popular literature, the dominant and the marginalized, the masculine and the feminine, but in both cases, there is a close connection between theory and fiction and both raise concerns regarding consumer culture and the scientific methods of knowledge. However, subjectivity is one of the major theoretical issues on which postmodernism and feminism tend to disagree (Waugh 1989). Feminist criticism focuses on issues of identity and invites the disagreement of postmodern theory since the politics of focusing on women's interests forces feminism to reconstruct a certain united subject of 'I' or 'we' while postmodern approaches focus explicitly on the decentered subject that is created by impersonal signifying mechanisms. Several feminist theorists argue that they follow a definition of identity that postmodernism has already abandoned because they have never possessed a self-identical subject image. Having been forced into the discursive position of the other, women have never experienced a coherent, self-realizing, united subject position. This leads them to relate differently to the issue of the subject since there is no other way to go beyond the position that they had never occupied before. Similarly to many women writers, contemporary feminists have recognized the contradictions inherent within liberal and humanist conceptions of the subject but refuse to give up their demand for a strong sense of self (Waugh 1989: 14–16).

It is also important to note, claims Butler in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993: 9), that constructing this self must not be limited to merely subverting the terminology. Even if we switch the concepts of 'discourse' and 'subject', the argument that 'discourse constructs the subject' still manages to maintain the subject position of the grammatical construct, meaning that the word 'discourse' occupies a certain subject position. In this sense, the grammatical and metaphysical position of the subject remains intact. Judith Butler (1995) also raises the question of who 'gets constituted as the feminist theorist whose framing of the debate will get publicity? Is it not always the case that power operates in advance, in the very procedures that establish who will be the subject who speaks in the name of feminism, and to whom?' (1995: 41). 'And how is it that the very category, the subject, the 'we', that is supposed to be presumed for the purpose of solidarity, produces the very factionalization it is supposed to quell?' (48). She claims that feminist movements should not become subjects based on a model that creates an internal field of exclusion; they should be criticizing the processes that create identity categories. Making relations of power underlying the construction of the subject visible through postmodern theories is not the same as taking away the subject, but rather ensuring that an expression such as 'subject' would be available for reuse and reorganization that were not permitted before. However, it seems that within feminism it is necessary to speak as women and for women, and this is impossible without a conscious identity and identity politics. At the same time, any attempt to endow the category of 'women' with an universal or specific content would inevitably lead to factionalization, which suggests that *identity* as a starting point can never become a solid foundation for feminist movements. Identity categories are never purely descriptive: they are also always normative and therefore exclusionary (49–50). Therefore, Judith Butler suggests a conception of the feminist speaking subject and the category of 'woman' that counters both the opposition of postmodern theories and the inner conflicts and exclusionary mechanisms of feminist groups. There is no need for a predefined concept of identity; on the contrary, the conflicts surrounding the content of the concept should be preserved and cherished within the ranks of women and this conflict should become the unestablished foundation of feminist theory as well. This way, instead of restricting its use, questioning the subject of feminism would grant the concept an open space so that it may be enriched by unforeseen new meanings (50).

These debates surrounding the relationship of feminism and postmodernism have been ongoing since the 1980's. Lidia Curti (1998) provides an overview of how conceptions of femininity are discussed by deconstructionist theorists

such as Derrida and Baudrillard[2]; and of the emergence of a generation of feminist theorists that enriched postmodern critical thought by raising questions about femininity such as Gayatri Spivak, Alice Jardine, Teresa de Lauretis, Naomi Schor, Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson, Susan Bordo, Trinh T. Minha and Rosi Braidotti (Curti 1998: 17). She then reviews recent debates within feminist criticism where she distinguishes between three major issues: feminine otherness, the importance of theories and the debates surrounding the question of essentialism and anti-essentialism. All three are closely connected to the already discussed conflict between postmodernism and feminism that on the one hand emphasizes the particularities and uniqueness of the feminine subject (its position in society and culture, its minority-majority position, skin color, sexual and physical characteristics) and on the other presents a fragmented conception of femininity with blurred boundaries, genres and loose categories of identity. Intermediary positions have also emerged within this critical debate. Curti refers to articles by Teresa de Lauretis (1994), Gayatri Spivak (1994) and Naomi Schor (1994) which are aimed at resolving these conflicts in order to link the unique features and differences of femininity with a diverse, multicultural, decentered notion of identity (Curti 1998: 16–27).

According to Rosi Braidotti, after the turn of the millennium, the categories of 'sex' and 'gender' proved inadequate for a late postmodern conception of feminine identity due to a newly arising demand for the formulation of an identity that takes into account the diverse historical traditions and regional differences of feminist movements. The formation of European feminine identity was heavily influenced by the events at the end of the twentieth century, such as the Balkan war, the fall of the Iron Curtain or the creation of the European Union. Rosi Braidotti argues that the question of ethnicity continues to determine the fundamental social processes of Europe including the situation of women, which means that issues of feminine identity emerge differently in the United States and certain parts of Europe (2002: 168). At the same time, she emphasizes that the constantly transforming (feminine) postmodern subject is created in a complex and contradictory web of bodily desires, conscious decisions together with power, social and symbolic relations (2002: 160).

2 Lidia Curti references Baudrillard's *Fatal Strategies* (London: Pluto, 1990) and Derrida's 'Women in the Beehive: A Seminar' in Alice Jardine, Paul Smith eds. *Men in Feminism* (London: Methuen, 1987). *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative Identity and Representation.* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 17.

Narrative Subjectivity

Ann Banfield's linguistic analysis of modern prose has implications that are consistent with poststructuralist conceptions of the subject. Banfield considers free indirect discourse and special cases of narration that cannot be tied to a narrator as phenomena that are exclusively created by narrative literary language. There is widespread research on the application of narrative approaches to free indirect discourse, and most of them concern the narrative voice, but I only intend to highlight issues that are closely related to the question of narrative subjectivity. As we know, there is only partial correspondence between the clause of free reported speech and the main clause: the person matches while the verb tense or deictic expressions (such as 'here', 'there', 'now' or 'yesterday') do not. The most characteristic features of the free indirect discourse are the appearance of the adverb 'now' (instead of 'then', which would follow from the rule of grammatical alignment), and keeping all interjections and exclamations. Rather than calling it 'free indirect discourse', Ann Banfield calls it narrative indirect discourse, represented speech and thought or unspeakable sentences since these utterances cannot be used in a speech situation and pertain exclusively to written prose. Unspeakable sentences are also contrasted with the oral nature of indirect discourse (1982: 17–18) due to the fact that Banfield's theory is based on Benveniste's distinction between the concepts of *histoire* and *discours*. The latter is usually accompanied by deictic expressions and a person system within a communication model, while the former is considered a form of narration that cannot be linked to a personal narrator because nobody is talking – it is the events that narrate themselves (Benveniste 1970: 206).

In Banfield's theory, the subject of unspeakable sentences is a self that is not identical with the narrator of the communicative situation – this narrative subject has no voice, no characteristic accent, dialect or particular mode of speech. This self does not take its audience into account, it makes no attempt at communication and has no other function but narration itself, which gives the impression that the events are narrating themselves (2002: 178–179). Banfield argues that in represented thought and speech, we do not see a dual voice of narrator and character; in other words, just because certain words and expressions cannot be attributed to a character it does not automatically mean that those are being spoken by a narrator (189). Ann Banfield also argues that until the end of the nineteenth century, the use of *passé simple* (simple past) in the French language was limited to literary narration only. The separation of *passé simple* from oral forms of speech can be dated to the sixteenth century, and it is no coincidence that the

narrative form of represented speech and thought first emerged in La Fontaine's writing and its development was parallel to that of the novel (225–30).

Banfield's notions sparked numerous debates that are still ongoing, and regarding the issue of subjectivity, I find it crucial to highlight a comment by Christine Brooke-Rose, who drew a parallel between that debate and the debate between Derrida and Searl. In her opinion, theorists who think along the lines of the dual voice and the dichotomy of the character's voice and the narrative voice make the mistake of reducing the special written genre of the narrative to a mere copy of speech, thereby changing the unspeakable to speakable. In other words, they repeat the phonocentric and logocentric process that Derrida criticizes from Plato to Austin and Searl: they maintain the privilege of voice and speech and stifle the diversity of writing (Brooke-Rose 1990: 154–60).

In his overview of the issues of free indirect discourse, the person of the narrator and the narrative *voice*, Richard Aczel (1998) presents and then redevelops the notions of Banfield and the theorists criticizing her approach. He emphasizes that greater attention should be given to the contextual, syntactical, lexical and rhetorical characteristics and the role of the reader when examining the narrator and narrative free indirect discourse due to the fact that a purely linguistic analysis that focuses on highlighted sentences instead of the whole text will only show a simplified picture and as such it is not an efficient way of interpreting literary texts. Regarding the character of the narrator and the issue of narration without a narrator, he offers the solution of treating the concept of the narrator as an umbrella term for different functions: some of which are necessary (selection, editing, the presentation of narrative elements) and some of which are only potential parts of the concept. The impersonal narrator, commentaries and addressing the narratee could belong to the latter type (1998: 492). Nevertheless, to continue the thoughts of Richard Aczel, raising the issue of 'narration without a narrator' opens a space in theoretical research that allows the study of the operation of a non-humanist view of people and history within narrative prose and enables narratology to engage in dialogue with poststructuralist theoretical conceptions of the subject.

In a later study, Richard Aczel (2001) further develops his thoughts on the issue of the narrative voice. Based on Shakespeare's Sonnet 23 ('To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit'), he considers the reader's gaze during reading to be a certain type of hearing, an overhearing of voices. He does not accept Derrida's widespread views on the voice and considers the voice neither as a metaphor of presence and origin nor the manifestation of metaphysical thinking. He refers to Bakhtin in his argument that no single statement can be tied to the presence of the narrator since every voice itself is a polyphonic quotation-like act of speech full of differences and delays that cannot be traced to a single original source (2001: 600–4).

Text, narration, fable and subject are basic narrative factors of the critical narratology of Mieke Bal, who criticizes the classical narratology of Genette for failing to reflect upon its own basic assumptions. The basic categories of Genette are time, modality and voice, and while the issue of the subject does not emerge explicitly, the voice metaphor suggests that Genette presupposes a self-identical intentional subject behind the speaking voice. He also presupposes that the interpreter of the text believes the words of the text, which means that this system fails to take the suppressions, omissions and silences of the text into account. In contrast, it is exactly these hidden contents that the critical narratology of Mieke Bal aims to bring to the surface (1991: 35–39).

Using the analogy of *narrator* and *narratee*, Mieke Bal supplements Genette's *focalizer* with the category of the *focalized* spectacle, which allows interpretations of a text to distinguish spectacles that cannot be linked to a focalizing person or do not need to be tied to a personalized viewpoint. This in turn allows for the identification of perspectives in narrative texts beyond humanist conceptions (1991: 75–79). Bal attempts to define a complex subject that fuses both psychological, sociological and ideological perspectives and can be adapted into the system of narrative communication. The definition of the decentered narrative subject is as follows: the subject of action and cognition that links, produces, transmits and suppresses different meanings that are in line with the rules of the system in which the subject functions. Lastly, she establishes a network of subjectivity from the correlations of a multiple-variable chart that serves as a narratological approach to the decentered subject (146–150).

In his book *Fictional Truth,* Michel Riffaterre (1990) offers a discussion of the unconscious of fiction but uses this concept differently from other theorists – he heavily emphasizes the differences of the psychological unconscious and the textual unconscious, and disagrees with the projection of psychological models onto textual analysis. Using a close textual analysis of Henry James' novel *The Golden Bowl*, he traces the way certain words and phrases emerge in the most diverse contexts as their meaning becomes more and more divergent. The 'subtext of angularity' (the matrix of mentioning angular things) first emerges in the discourse of the narrator and then finds its way into the discourse of the characters. The character can have no idea what metaphors were being used by the narrator, and yet these metaphors continue to emerge in newer and newer contexts endowed with newer and newer meanings without the characters having any inkling of the interplay of these texts and the framework of references forming in the background. Riffaterre thus concludes that the lexicon of angularity belongs to a metalinguistic commentary that each character is distanced from, allowing it to function as an indicator of fictionality (1990: 68–71).

In his essay *Ariadne's Thread*, J. Hillis Miller interprets the relationship between narrativity and subjectivity as the relation between the character-subject, the narrator-subject and the textuality of the narrative. According to the author, the English word *character* carries the meaning of *carving*, *chiseling*, *scratching* and *patterning*, leading to the correspondence (that can also be traced in the Hungarian language) that *character* ('letter') and *character* ('person') share the same linguistic form. This clearly indicates that fictional characters, rather than treated as human beings, should be considered as phenomena that coexist in multiple and diverse correlations that are inseparable from the language of the text. The word *character* also incorporates the assumption that the external form is indicative of internal nature, the way the visible characteristics of the face were considered hieroglyphic signs that showed a person's traits. In other words, what used to be a synecdoche later gained literal meaning. However, the trope of the *character* is also problematic since the correspondence between external and internal attributes remains unclear, leading to the question whether a person has internal nature or not. This trope is basically catachrestic pointing to an entity that is none other than the non-existent coherent person. This trope creates the idea of united personality which is one of the inevitable fictions of Western culture, a deeply rooted assumption just like logocentrism. It dictates that if a personality exists, then it can only be approached through tropes but can never be reached entirely. Miller argues that all discourse pertaining to characters is unavoidably interwoven with tropes (1992: 29–33) and seeks to examine the meaning of *character* (as word, entity and concept) in the writing of nineteenth and twentieth century writers and thinkers, such as Nietzsche, Benjamin, Baudelaire, Derrida, Trollope, George Eliot, Poe, Rabelais and Wittgenstein. His aim is to bring the hidden, forgotten or faded meanings of the word to the surface and uses different methods to point out the fundamental contradiction that the signs of a character's personality not only presume but also create what they signify. Signs indicating the character are therefore constative and referential on the one hand, and performative and constitutive on the other (36–40). Miller concludes that skepticism regarding united perspective of personality and the idea of the united subject exist simultaneously in the post-renaissance periods of Western culture. However, from Cervantes and Stern to Diderot, Locke and Hume, writers and philosophers have constantly questioned or transformed the concept of the fixed subject in some shape or form. According to Miller, the most important social function of a united subject as suggested by novels is to create an audience within its group of readers that is bound by the illusion of a coherent personality. In this sense, poetics that appears to question the essential subject can basically

be regarded as a particular form of self-deconstruction that is both destructive and constructive, deconstructing what is already in ruins in order to maintain the illusion that what has been destroyed still exists (97).

According to Teresa de Lauretis, feminine subjectivity could only be created in relation to masculine subjectivity. Just like in language and film, the feminine subject could only find itself in an intermediate position between a subject and an object, in a non-existent space that could not be represented or signified, in the vacuum between the feminine viewer and the woman as object (1984: 6–8). She argues that the movement of desire, subject and narrative are inseparable concepts inasmuch as desire governs the progression of the narrative and the subject follows these desires while overcoming obstacles as it moves forward. As such, the formulation of a subject like the protagonist is created by the mechanisms of the narrative. The myth of Oedipus, one of the most well-known stories of Western culture is presented as a typical case of the close connection between desire and narrative. Lauretis also argues that when Freud interprets the sexual desires of the child as an Oedipus complex, he himself is under the influence of *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, which shows how mechanisms of desire and narrative are inseparable from one another. In other words, every narrative where the objective is cognition and self-cognition basically repeats the question raised by King Oedipus: 'Who am I?'. Every narrative follows an Oedipal logic in its struggle towards a solution or in dealing with the loss of an initial ideal state. At the same time, finding the solution means that the protagonist and the reading subject achieve self-cognition, allowing the narrative to reinforce and legitimize a coherent, self-identical masculine subject. In other words, every narrative that ends in enlightenment basically reproduces a stable subject. In this story, female characters such as the Sphinx or Jocaste are static rather than dynamic – they are positioned to obstruct the activation and progression of Oedipus on the path of enlightenment. The narrative thus becomes a process that produces fundamental oppositions and primarily gender differences. Since the reader cannot separate herself from the distinguishing processes of the narrative, she is forced to identify with one of the offered dichotomized positions: the man-as-hero or the woman-as-obstacle one (109–115).

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon examines postmodern novels from the perspective of subjectivity, language and conceptions of history, drawing parallels between postmodern theories and conceptions of language and the subject in postmodern novels. According to Hutcheon, self-reflexive, fractional and metafictional novels question our traditional views of history the same way poststructuralist theories do: some novels raise the question of subjectivity in

ways that also include issues of gender identity, sexuality and women's representation. Hutcheon compares the arguments of contemporary feminist theorists (such as Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis and Catherine Belsey, whom she references in greater detail) with two literary works, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie and *The White Hotel* by D. M. Thomas. In the novel *The White Hotel*, the female protagonist cannot in any way be considered the center of consciousness, someone whom the reader could identify with the way James' novels allow. The novel presents the heroine the way others and she interprets or reads herself, which makes this female subject a product and spectator of the discourse of others. Following the logic of de Lauretis, Hutcheon emphasizes that reading and film spectatorship are the same inasmuch as the spectator and the reader already possess a socially and ideologically constructed gender identity. She highlights the importance of a previously mentioned argument by de Lauretis that the female spectator (or reader) possesses the contrasted positions of the subject and the object of spectatorship. It is exactly this contradiction that D. M. Thomas brings to the surface in his representation of the female protagonist. According to Hutcheon, feminist theories and gender-oriented postmodern novels view the feminine subject as an especially contradictory decentered subject, and both novel and theory question the voyeuristic masculine viewpoint of patriarchal society that both idealizes and fetishizes women. The complex viewpoints of the novels do not allow us to arrive at an all-encompassing idea of the subject of the protagonist and also prevent the reader from finding or creating a subject position from which these novels would form a continuous coherent whole. As a result, the reader cannot assume herself to be united identity (1988: 158–165).

Recent feminist and narratological research also questions the idea of a coherent reader subjectivity from a variety of angles. For example, Susan Lanser suggests that considering the interplay between story and narration in certain libertarian eighteenth-century novels allows us to recognize a latent lesbian plot embedded in the dominant heterosexual story. By attending the form of the novels rather than the events she also argues for a Sapphic plot that is located in the tangents of some eighteenth-century domestic novels and not in their central subjects (2009: 498).

Robin R. Warhol (2003) examines the tearjerker effect of sentimental literature which directly affects the bodily functions of the reader and evades the criticizing role of the intellect. Nowadays, certain works exercise direct influence over the body and their effects can not only be mapped out but even integrated into market processes as well. Bypassing conscious control, the literary narrative and the reader's body come into direct contact, making tearjerker literature similar

to the important postmodern cultural act of body writing or tattooing. When examining the decentered construction of the reading subject, unlike psychoanalytic scholars who focus on mechanisms of desire or sexuality, Warhol places emphasis on the direct physical reactions elicited by contemporary sentimental literature and film, soap operas and television shows. Robin R. Warhol calls attention to the tangible intertwining of sentimentalism and cultural sexism. The modern tradition of distinguishing high and popular culture has led to viewing popular literature as feminine and high culture as masculine. The wide audience of female readers consuming sentimental literature in the first half of the twentieth century also contributed to these pervasive assumptions that we would nowadays consider to be mere prejudice. However, it is no coincidence that the condescending categorization of contemporary sentimental films and literature carries connotations of gender as seen in the derogatory term: 'women's weepy' (2003: 34–7).

Concluding this theoretical chapter, I can summarize that the correlations between narrativity, subjectivity and gender identity are still debated in academic literature and await academic scrutiny from new perspectives. However, we may still draw conclusions from the scholarly discussions we have examined above. Contemporary narrative theoretical research has moved away from previous formalist conceptions and now considers literature as a dynamic process rather than a static object, with almost every researcher emphasizing the necessity of reevaluating previous assumptions. Postmodern conceptions of the subject have encouraged scholars to reconsider the basic elements of narratology and raise new questions in research. New concepts have emerged, such as non-humanist views in narrative, narration that cannot be tied to a narrator, the omissions of the narrative, the unconscious of the text, and questioning the dichotomy of the narrative voice and the voice of the character. The exclusive use of the communication model has also been rejected. On the other hand, narrative research has also had an impact on theories of subjectivity, when recent research has placed the focus on the multifaceted relationship of desire and narrative.

It is important to note that our discussion of postmodern subjectivity inevitably leads us to consider the issue of gender roles due to the fact that aspects of gender may have a defining role in the formation of the ideologically and discursively created subject. Feminist critical conceptions should not be separated from postmodern theories the way some Hungarian scholars divorced the two in the 1990's, evidenced by the fact that these issues appear side by side in the majority of postmodern literary works. At the same time, issues of subjectivity emerge in particular ways when we consider feminine aspects. Contemporary feminist criticism faces both its own demands for the emergence of a strong and

united subject that pursues its own interests from its own ideological position and the necessity of a disunited subject. This contradiction sparks further debate of course, which leads to the conclusion that it is impossible to construct an untraditional alternative image of femininity without contradictions. In the following analytical chapters I intend to illustrate that feminine subjectivity should not be imagined as an entity but as a process that incorporates paradoxes, contradictions and openness. It is created in the interplay of literature, its reader and the open-endedness of rhetorical language. My textual analyses could also be considered a certain type of cultural analysis since my research interests primarily concern the conceptions of cultural identity that are created, reproduced or questioned by the rhetorical language of literature.

My aim is to contribute to research foregrounding Hungarian literature and Hungarian women writers by placing their work in an international context. From a feminist perspective, I attempted to distance myself from the view entrenched in critical and popular thinking which inherently links gender aspects to the issue of authorship or to female characters. To discuss the gender of authors would be fruitless because it does not necessarily reflect upon the formation of identities represented in their writing. In the following chapters, I also emphasize that narrative subjectivity as marked by gender cannot be limited to the figures of the narrator and the character, or to their voices. Instead, it is formed both in the textual and rhetorical matrix of the text and forms of cooperative readership.

Chapter 2: Figures of Narrative Subjectivity in the Works of Margit Kaffka, Emma Ritoók, Jolán Földes and Anna Lesznai

In this chapter, I focus on frequently used poetic tropes and approaches, and the possible reader roles inherent within, which do not pertain specifically to the personalities or discourses of (feminine) narrators and (feminine) characters. They do not involve a united notion of subjectivity either, but still contribute to the decentralized feminine subjectivity and self-image emerging from the text. I also examine the ways in which female writers have contributed to literary modernity, and discuss approaches and rhetorical tropes that are able to convey the peculiarities of femininity. To this purpose, I have chosen to discuss a range of gendered narrative-rhetorical figures appearing in the works by women writers of the first half of the twentieth century, which allow an interpretation that foregrounds a particular feminine identity. Inspired by feminist researchers Griselda Pollock and Rita Felski, I examine instances and possible interpretations of gendered narration, such as the rhetoric of enumeration, overlapping cultural and fictional narratives, and the projection of feminine subjectivity onto objects. I also emphasize that we must take into account not only the voice, language and personality of a character or narrator when examining constructs of their (feminine) self-image, but also other signs provided by the rhetorical effects of the text.

Modernization, industrialization, urbanization and demographic growth resulted in fundamental changes, not only in the economy, society, scientific thinking and the arts, but also in other areas like private lives, popular culture or the transformation of traditional feminine gender roles. The process of modernization was fueled further in the first half of the twentieth century as the emancipation of women, the emergence of women on the labor market, their right to vote and enter higher education, and women graduates choosing intellectual careers unleashed hitherto dormant social energies. I intend to approach these issues from the perspective of narrative texts, and examine the ways in which women writers have contributed to literary modernity, as well as those approaches and rhetoric tropes that are able to convey the peculiarities of femininity.

In the examined time period, women's literature was largely informed by Hungarian feminism emerging after the Compromise of 1867, which means that certain issues posed by contemporary feminism emerged as literary topics,

while others did not – for example, while the education and emancipation of women was an important literary topic, the right to vote, which was another pressing issue of contemporary feminism, was not. Nevertheless, they did highlight problems that could not be approached through political categories, such as the internal struggles of women, their spiritual hardships as they strived for emancipation, and the complex games of power and attraction between men and women.

The roots of Hungarian feminism and feminist criticism gaining momentum at the turn of the millennium both date back to women's literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. Not only does this allow contemporary feminist research to rediscover forgotten works of feminine modernity, but we may also say that feminist perspectives are themselves informed by these literary works in the process. Unlike the processes experienced in Western Europe, Hungarian women's movements at the beginning of the twentieth century have continued well into the present, as similar issues, such as the problems of feminine identity, keep emerging time and time again. To give an example, the emergence of women on the labor market at the beginning of the twentieth century was considered one of the driving forces of the economy – and a century later, in a period of economic crisis, the idea that women have resource potential on the labor market has been popularized once again.

As subjects of literary discourse, women writers frequently chose the peculiarities of feminine existence and the issue of feminine identities as the *object* of their writing, becoming speaking subjects at a historical and intellectual-historical time when the notion of the subject started to become denaturalized. One of the most fundamental changes of twentieth century philosophy was questioning the Cartesian subject, leading to issues such as the decentralization of the subject, the very structure of identity categories, the linguistic, ideological and innate attributes of the subject, and the questioning of coherent and united personalities. We thus see the formulation of a sense of feminine identity in a period when individuals and individuality were in crisis, and the self-image that sought self-realization and means of discovering and conquering the outside world began to crumble. In other words, feminine individualism gained representation at a time when individualism proper was slowly becoming discredited, and this chapter discusses how novels written at the beginning of the twentieth century manage to overcome this contradiction. In this period, women's writing already reflects the realization that the self-realizing, world conquering, masculine Cartesian subject is not a viable path for them. Therefore, I analyze rhetorical approaches where discursive positions take precedence over the speaker, and at

the same time represent a feminine perspective that channels feminine voices. Furthermore, I also emphasize that when we analyze the constructs of a (feminine) self-image, we have to take into account not only the voice, language or personality of the character or narrator, but also other signs emerging elsewhere in the text. Classical narratology, for instance, would ask, 'Who speaks?' or 'Who sees?' (Genette 1980: 186), but this would not allow us to arrive at a narrative feminine identity that arises from the controversy of central and decentralized subjectivity. Since methods that focus on a character or narrator automatically assume a humanist subjectivity, the approach is unable to uncover the decentralized self-image sought in the text (Fludernik 2001: 619–22).

In the following section, I focus on frequently used poetic tropes and approaches, and the possible reader roles inherent within, which do not pertain specifically to the personalities or discourses of (feminine) narrators and (feminine) characters, but still contribute to the decentralized feminine subjectivity and self-image emerging from the text. I also focus on gendered prose poetry methods used by women writers from the first half of the twentieth century, which allow an interpretation that foregrounds a particular feminine identity. Towards the end of the 1980's, there was a particular trend in feminist research that sought to extend the interpretation of modern achievements to include the works of women artists. One of the most prominent scholars of this approach was art historian Griselda Pollock, who researched the distinctive features of works by women painters, and criticized exclusionist approaches that promote a single masculine perspective, thereby preventing feminine perspectives from gaining ground. Pollock dedicated several earlier and recent studies to the works of women artists (such as Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot), and focused on analyzing features that differed from those of contemporary male artists. In the chapter *Spaces of Femininity* in her book *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (1988), she highlights the differences in the visual thematization of space and the gaze between female and male artists. For example, just like Manet or Degas, Morisot and Cassatt also bring spatial organization into play, but in a different way. Morisot's works, for instance, often operate with two spatial systems or two separate spaces with strongly marked boundaries (such as a rail along the patio or balcony, a balustrade, a veranda, a shore, a dam, a dike or the edge of a boat). Pollock interpreted this spatial binary, and the dichotomy of the outside and the confined inside as a manifestation of gender perspectives. In her reading, this binary space is divided into masculine and feminine, and the isolated, confined and decentralized 'central' figure symbolizes the confinement and marginalization of women (Pollock 1988: 62). Pollock also

considers the gaze, the scenery, and methods that question the objectification of women as common features in the works of early modern women painters, and presents a very persuasive analysis of Cassatt's painting *At the opera* (1879) in her book (1988: 75–78).

We also have to discuss another feminist critical approach, which positions women's achievements as an important and enriching contribution to modernization, and considers focusing on the ostracization of women to be an oversimplification and also the reproduction of ostracizing perspective on a meta-level. One representative of this second approach is Rita Felski, who strived to present a more well-rounded picture of the generally accepted feminist view that, in the age of modernity, women's activities were confined to the private sphere (their family and the home), while men enjoyed access to both these and the public sphere (the workplace, entertainment venues and coffee houses). According to Felski, this dichotomy can be overwritten by presenting a more complex picture, and argues, in reference to research by others, for example, Buci-Glucksmann (1986: 222), that the notion of clearly separated spaces (private as feminine, public as masculine) had already been altered by the fact that thousands of women workers had contributed to mass production in factories. The growth of consumer culture also undermined the boundaries of private and public, as the emergence of supermarkets allowed middle class women to access a new public space where they could move freely – without an escort –, and engage in social intercourse. Shopwindows also undermined the separation of private and public by virtue of showcasing intimate items of clothing in a public space, while at the same time, mass produced consumer goods entered the private space of homes. Let us not forget that gaining political rights and the right to work and enter high education also aided this conquest of public spaces (Felski 1995: 19–21).

I favor both feminist critical approaches discussed above, as both bring up valid points. My research relates to scholars highlighting exclusion and difference inasmuch as I also look at instances of modernist feminine poetics, and call attention to the works of Emma Ritoók, just as Pollock foregrounded the works of Cassatt and Morisot. However, I also incorporate Felski's arguments as I search for possible points of convergence between masculine and feminine modern prose and discuss Ritoók's writing alongside the prose of Margit Kaffka and Dezső Kosztolányi.

With the exception of Kaffka, women writers of the first half of the twentieth century – including Anna Lesznai, Wanda Tóth, Cecile Tormay, Renée Erdős, Emma Ritoók, Jolán Földes, Irén Gulácsy, Juliánna Zsigray, Laura Dánielné Lengyel, Anna Szederkényi, Sophie Török, Mária Berde, Mária Szabó and

Piroska Szenes – have all but vanished into oblivion. An entire generation has been erased from our literary consciousness, despite the fact that they had been acknowledged and praised by their contemporaries, and often mentioned as a group. For example, The West [Nyugat] one of the most important Hungarian literary journals between 1908 and 1940 dedicated to modernist art and culture, frequently published the writings of Kaffka, Lesznai, Tóth and Sarolta Lányi until 1919, followed by a rapid succession of poems by Török and Piroska Reichard, and several publications by Lola Kosáryné Réz, Laura Dánielné Lengyel and Anna Szenes.

As one of the less celebrated women writers, Ritoók saw the elevation of Kaffka above other women writers as a personal conflict. In one of her letters to Tibor Dénes, she rebuked the critic for calling her a follower of Kaffka, referring to his final statement in his book on Kaffka, 'The lifework of Margit Kaffka did not vanish without a trace – we need only think of *Spiritual Adventurers* [A szellem kalandorai] by Emma Ritoók, or the works of Dezső Szabó.' Ritoók highlighted not only her precedence, but also her artistic independence when she wrote, 'I have often read in literary reviews that Kaffka was the first woman writer to write about the spiritual struggles of modern women that you have also highlighted, and I said nothing, despite the fact that *On a Straight Path Alone* [Egyenes úton egyedül], *Great Coincidence* [A nagy véletlen] and even *Spiritual Adventurers* [A szellem kalandorai][3] had tackled this issue sooner than her works did. This is natural, seeing as how I am older, and walked down this path at an earlier time. By 1900, I was attending university, and from 1904 onward, I was visiting universities abroad, and clearly saw those conflicts that have unfolded around me, and which I was also involved in. However, if this is the influence that you refer to, Professor, then I must protest, and take a stand, if not for my precedence, then for my independent literary achievements' (Ritoók 1933: n. pag.).[4] Ritoók's complaint was indeed justified – not only did Dénes fail to take Ritoók's earlier works into consideration, but he even stated in the foreword of his book that 'Margit Kaffka emerged in Hungarian literature unprecedented, and the 'document feminine' is her legacy' (Dénes 1932: 3).

The women writers and poets emerging in the first half of the twentieth century have almost completely vanished from literary history. The very umbrella term 'women writers' – denoting the relationship between works and their authors – has disappeared, despite the fact that reviews of that period often mentioned

3 These Hungarian novels were written by Emma Ritoók.

4 All translations from the Hungarian were done by Éva Misits unless otherwise indicated.

them together, and made the connection between their literary activities and the social processes that altered women's gender roles in society. Of these women writers, Kaffka remains the only one standing – one may even risk the assumption that being isolated from women's issues and her contemporaries was the price she had to pay for her admission to the literary canon. Kaffka's writing now garners more attention, and many papers have been published of her works, but as Zsuzsa Horváth (2010: 3) points out, the majority of these papers only discuss *Colors and Years*, while other parts of her lifework remain unexplored as a lasting result of Kaffka's isolation. Only recently, after the landmark publications of Anna Fábri (1996) and Judit Kádár (2001) did critical attention turn towards the works of Hungarian modernist women writers. Many critics reinterpreted their works and reevaluted their role in Hungarian literary history, for example, Séllei (2001), Varga – Zsávolya (2009), Borgos –Szilágyi (2011), Menyhért (2013) and Kádár (2014). In an earlier study, I discussed features specific to women's prose in the works of women writers from the first half of the twentieth century, and emphasized that what we see is not self-realizing narration, but the challenging of the realist narrative tradition and the expansion of the narrative frame (Zsadányi 2007: 827). Following this logic, and the feminist research of Pollock and Felski, I now examine some instances and possible interpretations inherent in gendered impersonal narration, including the rhetoric of enumeration, overlapping cultural and fictional narratives, and the projection of feminine subjectivity onto objects.

The Trope of Enumeration and Feminine Self-Realization

Kaffka began her literary career with writing poems and short stories, and eventually joined the contemporary literary elite with her novels, of which *Colors and Years* [Színek és évek] (1912) is the most well-known today. While the first generation of The West [Nyugat] considered her an equal, few remembered her in the decade following her death. Eventually, in the 1980's, László Fülöp wrote several studies examining the relationship between psychoanalysis and prose in Kaffka's writing (Fülöp 1987), while György Bodnár analyzed time structure and the representation of social processes from the 1970's onward (Bodnár 2001). From the 1990's, we also see the emergence of papers that apply feminist critical and psychoanalytic perspectives, such as papers by Tötösy de Zepetnek (1993); Horváth (1999); Séllei (2001); Nyilasy (2005), and I intend to contribute to this line of work by discussing a lesser known novel by Kaffka.

From Kaffka's novel *Two Summers* [Két nyár] (1916), one may conclude that there is a connection between renouncing a goal-oriented historical perspective and the rejection of a unified, self- realizing self-image.

> Her father, the widowed carpenter, disowned her when she eloped with a mechanic from the village at the age of twenty. She was roughing it for three years, all her children stillborn, and then became a housekeeper to a windowed official for twenty crowns and love – when she got to know him, she judged him, as a prudent woman, to be suitable for her, and attached this Károly… With the money, they opened their own washhouse, then lost everything they owned in one year's time, and the rest was consumed by the woman's sickness, having brought with her a malady from the mechanic that prevented her from having any more children. (Translation by Éva Misits)[5]

Enumeration and juxtaposition are common structuring principles in the text, and serve to question narrative authority, since the speaker does not create subordinate relations, but merely notes the events, instead of structuring them. Both life-turning and marginal events happen to the female protagonist, which allows both to be juxtaposed, since the character accepts her fate, rather than directs it, and the narrator does no more than describe these events. What we hear is basically the voice of history without a narrator, as conceptualized by Emile Benveniste (1971: 206), engaging in impersonal discourse, which foreshadows the intrusion of war into the microcosm of the characters.

It is also important to examine the excerpt above from the perspective of the speaker. In the grammatical sense, it is a narrative statement, as the speaker tells the story of another instead of their own – in other words, we are given a heterodiegetic narrator, to use Genette's term from classical narratology (1980: 244–45). At closer inspection, rhetorical relations reveal that the character's discourse and way of thinking are permeating the dominant narrative perspective. It is the voice of a person who is aware of her limitations, and lives by a 'must survive' principle. This permeation, however, is latent in the rhythm of the enumeration and rhetoric elements, rather than in the vocabulary or semantics. The direction

5 Apja, az özvegy asztalos még húszesztendős korában kiátkozta, mikor egy gépésszel megszökött a faluból. Három évig küszködött avval, halva szülte a gyerekeit, aztán egy özvegy hivatalnoknál volt gazdasszony húsz koronáért meg szerelemért; amikor megismerte, okos asszonyítélettel magához valónak találta, és ügyesen magához kapcsolta ezt a Károlyt… A pénzből saját mosodát nyitottak; egy év alatt elúszott rajta mindenük; a maradékot felette az asszony betegeskedése, mert még a gépész idejéből hozott egy kis bajt, amiatt nem lett több gyerek.' Margit Kaffka, *Két nyár* [Two Summers] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1974), 3.

of permeation is also important: I emphasize here that the character's way of thinking permeates the discourse of the narrator.

A similar case can be observed in some of Dezső Kosztolányi's short stories from his late period. Let us examine an excerpt from his short story, *Motorboat* [Motorcsónak], at the beginning of which we are presented with a short summary of the character's life from the narrator's perspective.

> There is no person in the world who is truly happy, and there never can be. And yet there still is, and can be. I myself happen to know someone – even if it's just one person – who is truly happy, perhaps the happiest person in the world.
>
> It is Berci, Berci Weigl.
>
> Berci Weigl is our washerwoman's only son.
>
> I practically watched him grow up. He had been visiting us since he was a little kid, when his mother used to do the washing. He was a pale, plain-looking little boy, always silent, as if he had a secret that he would not share for all the world.
>
> He had little interest in his studies, and slipped from one grade to another in high school without anyone noticing. Then, just as he made the eight grade, the military
>
> snatched him up, and took him to the front lines.
>
> He did not get injured or captured, he received no honors – he simply went home safe and sound on the very day he was discharged.
>
> He immediately got married, too, and married – I know not why or how – a bland
>
> young lady working as a manicurist.[6] (Éva Misits' translation.)

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6 Nincs a földön egészen boldog ember. Nincs, és nem is lehet. De igenis van, és lehet is. Például én magam is ismerek valakit – igaz, hogy csak egyetlenegy embert –, aki egészen boldog, talán a föld legboldogabb embere.
Berci az, Weigl Berci.
Weigl Berci a mosónénk egyetlen fia.
Úgyszólván szemem láttára cseperedett föl. Kis kölyök kora óta eljött hozzánk esténként, amikor az anyja nálunk mosott. Sápadt, jelentéktelen fiúcska volt, mindig szótalan, mint akinek valami titka van, de nem beszélne róla a világ minden kincséért sem.
Ímmel-ámmal tanult, a gimnáziumban úgy csúszott egyik osztályból a másikba, hogy észre se vették. Alighogy a nyolcadikba került, berántották katonának, vitték a tűzvonalba.
A háborúban nem sebesült meg, nem esett fogságba, nem is tüntette ki magát, hanem épen és szépen hazajött a leszerelés első napján.
Mindjárt meg is nősült. Elvett – nem tudni, miért és hogyan – egy se-hal se-hús kézápoló kisasszonyt.' Dezső Kosztolányi, 'Motorcsónak' [Motorboat], in *Tengerszem: Válogatott Novellák* [Tarn: Selected Short stories] (Budapest, Európa, 2008), 49.

The narrator later enters the short story as a character, and from then on relates his impressions without any insight into Berci Weigl's mind, which results in clearly marked character and character-narrator subjects. The rest of the short story revolves around the family members asking the narrator-character to dissuade Berci from his impossible plans, which he attempts, to no avail. Meanwhile, we see from his perspective how poor the family is, living in an apartment too small for them, and as this unfolds, the characters of Berci and the narrator are sharply contrasted, one a sober, condescending person trying to persuade Berci, and the other, a stubborn man refusing to listen. Nevertheless, at the end of the text, the discourse is altered, and a new narrative voice emerges.

> When his children are coughing and crying, he thinks of the fact that he has a motorboat. When he sees his temple going gray, the hair atop his head giving away, and his wife more old, ugly and sour by the day, when they harangue him about having nothing to eat at home, when his mother's waist hurts after washing chores, when his mother-in-law is picking at his colored moles, when he is being bullied by the silent Transylvanian refugee, and embarrassing financial arguments arise from selling cigarettes, he thinks of the fact that he has a motorboat. When others disdain and scorn him, when he has to scribble in the factory in a luster armband, when people constantly remind him that he is nothing and nobody, that he does not count in society, though he can count in his office until he croaks, he thinks of the fact that he has a motorboat, and those who exploit him, ignore him and kick him, do not have a motorboat. When the Danube freezes a good span thick in winter, with a meter of snow on top of that icy skin, when darkness consumes the very pillars of the bridge so that one cannot even see the water that is so wonderful to roam on, he thinks of the fact that nothing lasts forever, and March will see it going again – always and everywhere, he thinks of the fact that he has a motorboat.
>
> I have been watching him for years, and I admire his happiness, for it does not dissipate, but grows more and more. Not even fulfillment could put an end to it. This is why I risked the assumption that Berci Weigl was a happy man, perhaps the happiest person in the world. You do not need much for true happiness, really – just a good obsession, and a good motorboat.[7] (Translation by Éva Misits)

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7 Ha köhögnek és sírnak a gyermekei, arra gondol, hogy van neki egy motorcsónakja. Ha látja, hogy halántéka deresedik, hogy feje búbja kopaszodik, hogy felesége is vénül, csúnyul, savanyodik, ha otthon kenyérgond miatt nyafognak, ha édesanyja mosás után a derekát fájdítja, ha a napa különböző színű szemölcseit bibirkálja, ha a hallgatag erdélyi menekült zsarnokoskodik vele, és a cigarettaárusításból kifolyólag kínos pénzügyi viták támadnak, arra gondol, hogy neki van motorcsónakja. Ha mások lenézik és megvetik, ha a gyárban lüszter karvédővel bebugyolálva körmöl, ha unos-untalan eszébe hozzák, hogy ő senki és semmi, aki nem szoroz és nem oszt a társadalomban, csak hivatalában szorozhat és oszthat a rogyásig és meggebedésig, arra gondol, hogy van neki motorcsónakja, s azoknak, akik zsigerelik, kutyába se veszik, megrugdossák, nincs is motorcsónakjuk.

In the excerpt above, it is difficult to decide who the actual speaker is – semantically, it is possible that the narrator adopted Berci's vocabulary by using words such as *exploit him, ignore him, until he croaks, kick him, they do not have a motorboat* – these are the words of an angry, bitter man, and could easily be attributed to Berci. However, it is also a poetic, dynamic and rhythmic text with its own thought-rhythm, as one can feel that it is the obsessive thinking of a maniac, but at the same time, the everyday vocabulary of this obsession and desperation is elevated into an artistic construct. On close inspection, *he sees his temple going gray* not only rhymes with *old, ugly and sour by the day*, but also matches it in rhythm, lending charm to these common words of desperation as the female and male tones in the background come together into a single heart beat, and yet the comic effect is undeniable, which also mitigates the painful fact of aging.

The question of otherness is also foregrounded in both cases as they question the distinction between normal and other. The problem (which has recently resurfaced in theories of subordination) is how the benevolent Western intellectual occupying the normal position can acknowledge otherness without assimilation or appropriation. In *Motorboat*, both attitudes are present – we can see the condescending half reserving its normal position as it bestows second-hand clothing on the other, and also the half that is able to relate, despite themselves, to the obsessed maniac, and let the voice of this other into their own discourse. In the excerpt quoted above, this personal discourse is altered, and its language becomes receptive to the obsessed man's perspective.

It is also important to note that acknowledging the other in the text was not done through conscious concession, but through involuntary identification, as the text suggests that the narrator secretly adopted Berci's point of view to a certain degree, and repeated his obsession despite themselves, showing us that solidarity means liberating and voicing the other inside ourselves, rather than stifling and silencing it until it turns into prejudice. Another case of impersonal narration is *The Street of the Fishing Cat* [A halászó macska uccája] by Jolán

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Ha télen a Duna arasznyira befagy, s a hó egy méternyire födi el a jégkérget, ha sötétség takarja el még a híd pilléreit is, úgyhogy nem látni vizet sem, melyen olyan nagyszerű bolyongani, arra gondol, hogy semmi se tart örökké, márciusban megindul a zajlás, mindig és mindenütt csak arra gondol, hogy van neki motorcsónakja.
Évek óta figyelem, bámulom ezt a boldogságot, mely nem apad, nem csökken, hanem egyre növekszik. Ezt még a beteljesülés sem ölte meg. Ezért mertem megkockáztatni azt a véleményemet, hogy Weigl Berci boldog ember, talán a föld legboldogabb embere. Az igazi boldogsághoz nem is kell sok: csak egy jó rögeszme kell hozzá, meg egy jó motorcsónak.' Kosztolányi, 'Motorcsónak', in *Tengerszem: Válogatott Novellák*, 56–57.

Földes, the 1936 novel that won first prize in the international novel writing competition issued by Pinker Publishing in London. The award-winning novel was soon translated and published in several languages, and sold in the millions across Europe and America, with numerous editions published in several countries. However, at a time when the bestsellers of male novelists like Zsigmond Móricz, László Németh and Áron Tamási only sold in the thousands, contemporary critics did not know how to deal with the unprecedented success of Földes' novel, and soon labeled it insubstantial and superficial (Hegedűs 1989: 198).

Földes was born in 1902, and emigrated to Paris in 1919, where she became a worker, and eventually, a secretary at a film studio. Her other novels were also successful in Europe and America, and after she immigrated to London in 1941, she continued to write under the alias Yolanda Foldes, and later as Yolanda Clarent. Several of her books were also adapted to the big screen – Marlene Dietrich was the star of *Golden Earrings* (1947), for example.

One of the most pivotal inquiries posed by today's critics is how *The Street of the Fishing Cat* managed to become so successful, since the 1989 and the 2006 editions of the novel have been just as well received by readers. According to Károly Szakonyi in his foreword to the 1989 edition of the book, this success was due to talented story-telling, and the fact that Földes' simplistic imagery easily engages the reader (8), which is basically the same opinion held by her contemporary critics. However, in the afterword of the same edition, Géza Hegedűs takes a completely different stance, claiming that the time had come to judge the book objectively as an interesting novel of high artistic standard, and a timeless classic of Hungarian literature. He also reiterates, albeit more subtly, the observation that Földes' novel reads like a report, and draws a parallel between her narrative style and the present and past status reports of Knickerbocker, Egon Erwin Kisch, Emil Ludwig, and the war imagery of Remarque and Rodion Markovics, somewhere between romantic storytelling and fact-structuring report. After such warm reception, a new edition was published in 2006 (Hegedűs 1989: 197).

The novel ends as one of the characters, Annus, muses on people in exile, saying, 'One or two will hold their own on foreign ground. The rest? They shall pass, slowly and without a trace.' Looking back, *Street of the Fishing Cat* can also be read as a literary work resisting this traceless passing by standing as a memento of the long forgotten, and showing us micro histories not to be found in any history book. This way, as the characters speak of well known political events, they also transport them to a completely different textual environment.

Like many others after the First World War, the Barabás family tries to earn an honest living in Paris, and we follow the lives of the three Barabás children

(Klári, Jani and Anna) and their parents from the everyday problems of learning a foreign language and finding employment to the difficulties of integration and fighting homesickness. The family is also joined by a former Russian banker, a former Baltic mathematics teacher, and the family of a former Italian diplomat, forming an atmosphere in which these different points of view serve first and foremost to spice up conversation, as their bond is stronger than their differences. They have left their past behind and live in the present, for the present, turning their future into something of a fairy tale that the others can listen to with pleasure and sympathy. This displacement thus creates a unique chronotopos in the novel, wherein social differences fade away, past and present are torn apart, and the notion of being a family extends to these people living in a state of foreignness, in a space between their own culture and the receiving culture. What best characterizes Földes' novel is the use of present tense so that the narrator can maintain the illusion of conversation and story-telling. The narrator thus remains close to their characters not only in time, but also in value judgment, as the reports of the characters' daily struggles speak of sympathy, and a close bond. The use of present tense does away with the past, and forces us to concentrate on the here and now, keeping us in a constant state of readiness, because fast paced events (there is something new on every page – somebody going away, somebody showing up, sickness, death, love, and more symptoms of homesickness) constantly keep the readers on their toes. The novel is difficult to put down because it basically requires readers to share every single moment with the characters, who work hard on each and every page, their constant toil continuously felt. We may also understand the use of present tense as a lack of substantial progress in the family's life – although they manage to move to an apartment from the hotel, they lose the fruits of their labor over and over again, returning to poverty and struggling to rise once more. Another interesting feature of the narrative is that constant repetition not only changes the story itself, but also the way it is told. As the narrator keeps repeating constant everyday occurrences, the events fail to adhere to a progressive, goal-oriented structural frame. Therefore, just as in *Colors and Years*, the iterative structural principles also apply here, and the result is several narrative modes of constant adaptation and continuous renewal written into a meta-structure that is itself based on repetition.

Authors using impersonal narration often experiment with methods that 'test their limits', because they introduce new issues to literary discourse. Whereas Kaffka's *Colors and Years* [Színek és évek] turns the unliterary into literary, the non-novel into a novel, writing of everyday bickering and stealing the last pennies from the pocket of a sleeping drunkard, so Földes alters the selection of

events. In her case, the narrator does not choose events by sampling out the important ones that advance the plot – in other words, elements worthy of literary narration –, but rather gives the illusion of telling every event without discrimination as they unfold. This way, the authority of the narrator is questioned, and the act of storytelling becomes the fiction of the person noting the events, rather than the person that set them into motion.

The characters do not question the causes behind the events, but merely adapt to the current situation, much like the characters in *Two Summers* [Két nyár]. They do not revolt, having no one to revolt against, no tangible source of power to fight, as their lives are shaped by the impersonal factors of history beyond human comprehension. We are thus given a blend of impersonal and personal perspectives – a dual focus, if you will, as we learn of the impersonal narrative of history, the events of the First World War, from an individual's perspective, and this impersonal narration questions both the heroic nature of the self-realizing individual, and the validity of individual decisions. In this light, the grand narratives of historical processes also lose their heroic nature, and merely serve as background information to the foregrounded, thoroughly intense micro stories of the family.

Cultural and Fictional Narratives

After a short summary of her life, I will analyze the relationship between the predetermined gender roles for women in culture and the fictional life story of a woman in some of Ritoók's earliest short stories. Ritoók was born in Nagyvárad in 1868, and attended university in Budapest, Leipzig and Paris, where she graduated from the Faculty of Liberal Arts, and began working for the Metropolitan Library in Budapest. In 1905, she won a prize with her novel, *On a Straight Path Alone* [Egyenes úton egyedül], which, along with other earlier writings, explores issues of femininity, and offers a well-rounded, contemporary picture of the changing situation of women. She also translated literary works, and brought Northern literature to the Hungarian public. As for her lifework, it still awaits further scrutiny – recent feminist critics give preference to her earlier prose, while András Lengyel (1994) holds her philosophical work in high esteem.

Although it is well known that Ritoók was involved with the Sunday Circle [Vasárnapi Kör] and György Lukács, her literary activity is still largely ignored and forgotten. András Lengyel discusses Emma Ritoók's career in a very thorough and detailed study, following up the most important events and works of her life, such as her entering university education at the age of thirty-two, once new laws enabled women to pursue university degrees. Lengyel praises her work

as a philosopher, but does not consider her literary achievements important (1994: 15–19). Unlike Lengyel, I am of the opinion that Ritoók's literary activities also merit attention. Take, for example, her short stories in *Four Around the Fire* [Négyen a tűz körül] (1911), which are seemingly completely different and unrelated – there is no connection between them subject- wise, since they are stories told by people of very different social situations. Nevertheless, the narrative situation between the narrators and readers of *Four Around the Fire* ties them together all the same – in each case, we get a glimpse of the key moments of the characters' lives, and like in the light of the fire, certain events are illuminated, while others remain in the background. When we gain insight into certain events, we also develop assumptions about the material that is not said or textualized, and the presence of this dark, unspoken content is strongly felt 'behind' each illuminated story. The events are also told without any back story, so in theory, each short story could be told around the fire in conversation, as the narrative is not shaped by processes that progress in time, but rather appears to be a linear sequence of scenes that unfold in the present narration, thus giving the illusion of a narrative that progresses in time.

Prewritten social roles and the issue of gender are also present in Ritoók's writing. Of special interest are those parts in which the narrator enters into dialogue with the well-known cultural narrative, which basically means that fiction reenacts how fiction builds 'reality'. For example, in the short story *The Final Scene* [Az utolsó jelenet] in *Hostile World* [Ellenséges világ] (1913) we see an echo of the archetypal story of animosity between the aging, successful woman and the aspiring young woman. At first glance, we are merely reading a story about the great tragic actress, Eszter Domonkos, competing with the young, talented actress Józsa Simondi. In the story, the older actress retires at the height of her career, and begins a new life by opening an artistic salon. This is where a young, less talented man seizes the opportunity to become a popular writer with her help, and when Domonkos finds out that the man escorts her old rival home, she ends her life. It requires several re-readings of this story to detect the dramatic poses and overacted moments of the text that feel as if the characters were behaving according to prewritten roles.

In the story of the two women, there is a hint of an older story that motivates the actions of the actress, and reminds us of such cultural narratives as Sleeping Beauty, in which we see the traditional gender roles of our culture taking shape. However, Eszter Domonkos eventually manages to step out of the grand tale of animosity between women and creates a new discourse by opening her own salon, and being a talented individual, she succeeds in her endeavors. However,

a single sentence, objective and devoid of judgment, informs us of the threat to this new and independent world – 'Zoltán Újhelyi singled out this salon and this woman to build his future on'.[8] The narrator does not explain what is meant by 'build' – only the phrase *singled out* hints at a darker meaning, and so, even though the narrator's comment is unexplained, the phenomenon is so well-known that no expansion is necessary. Everybody is familiar with the idea of a young, ambitious man 'building' on an older and respected woman. This cultural narrative is just as well-known and banal as the animosity between the successful older actress and the aspiring younger actress. The sentence is not communicated from the actress' perspective – she is merely the chosen victim, which shows that the woman is the one gazed at, rather than the one who gazes, and therefore does not occupy an active position, but one where she is the one who the events happen to. This references a specific feminine fate, as evidenced by the self-explanatory nature of the text and the fact that the phenomenon does not warrant explanation. This statement is also connected to the narrative phenomena highlighted by Benveniste (1971), whereby the story relates itself without attaching to a central subject, narrator or character – it is a narrative statement in which people have no bearing on the outcome of the events happening to them.

The issue of older narratives, the influence of cultural patterns on human action, and the importance of reality-making roles and role-playing also surface in other earlier writings by Ritoók. In *Hanna's Dramas* [Hanna drámái] (1911), the focal point is the realizing potential of fiction, the scenes of scenes, and the role-play of the characters, which also direct attention to potential roles for the reader. The story is 'about' a young lady who longs for a more interesting (life)story than the one she ended up with, saying 'And she just had to have such a ridiculously simple, dull and common love story, and bear the acquiescent smiles of the whole party!'[9] In one particular scene of the short story, the scene itself creates emotions, and the situation creates the love story when the young man conveying a marriage proposal on behalf of his friend unwittingly succumbs to the dramatic situation and finds himself in the arms of the lady in question. Even they are unable to comprehend the situation – the drama simply happens to them, and they act out their roles as obedient puppets, rather than active agents of the situation, and only later, when Hanna utters the proper last words to her husband, does the

8 Ezt a szalont és ezt az asszonyt szemelte ki Újhelyi Zoltán, hogy a jövőjét reá alapítsa.' Emma Ritoók, *Ellenséges világ* [Hostile World] (Budapest: Nyugat, 1913), 54.

9 Hogy éppen neki kell ilyen nevetségesen egyszerű, unalmasan mindennapi szerelmi történetének lenni, amelyet az egész társaságnak a beleegyező mosolya kísér!' Ritoók, Emma, *Négyen a tűz körül* [Four Around the Fire] (Budapest: Politzer Zsigmond és Fia, 1911), 17.

situation lead to divorce. Hanna's thoughts thus point out the contradictions of forming a feminine identity, and the issues that surround the shaping of feminine subjectivity in the twentieth century – 'In this eternally monotone, gray life, even tragedies last but a few moments, and come and fade, unprepared, almost without you even knowing, leaving no trace behind'.

The notion of people almost automatically adopting roles without knowing means moving away from the idea of a coherent, self-forming and self-realizing, consciously controlled subjectivity. The space of feminine subjects is expressed in constant, halfway intentional, situational role-playing, which does not mean the rejection of roles or the search for a 'true' feminine self from a choice of social roles, but finding a different role altogether. The reader basically follows Hanna's roles, good or bad, from being a woman in love to a wife cheating on her husband, a divorced woman, and finally, a friend supporting a younger man. This casting lasts to the very end, from the start of her life to the finish, without any stepping out or any hidden feminine backdrop – in fact, the lack of these is virtually unfelt by readers. 'And Hanna clearly saw that this was the most interesting, the true drama of her life, unfolding behind the most everyday scene imaginable' (23).[10] Such narrative judgment does not rule out an ironic reading, but we still cannot say that a true femininity, or stepping out, are considered to be lacking, because feminine identity is constituted by previously determined cultural roles – a subjectivity surfacing from the story that goes beyond modernity, and is still relevant today.

In the short story *Galeotto*, Ritoók focuses on the realizing potential of fiction, and the logic of jealousy comes to be interpreted as a meta-narrative problematizing the issue of representation and what constitutes literature itself. The story is about an older woman marrying a younger man, and harboring jealousy towards her daughter from her first marriage. Although the two young people, the husband and the daughter, feel nothing for each other, the wife's unreasonable jealousy creates uncomfortable tension between them, which suddenly turns into love in a cliché courting scene (looking into each other's eyes as they exchange music sheets). It is not the two young people's love that sparks jealousy – instead, it is jealousy that sparks love between them, transforming the jealousy scene into a linguistic theory debate about the realizing potential of words.

10 És Hanna világosan érezte, hogy életének ez volt a legérdekesebb, az igazi drámája, amelyik a legmindennapibb jelenet mögött játszódott le.' Ritoók, *Négyen a tűz körül* [Four Around the Fire], 20.

'You are lying… it is true after all… you do love…'

'Silence, don't say it!' whispered the man, grabbing the woman's arm and forcing her onto the sofa. 'Don't say it! The way your jealousy showed what… could be… maybe the spoken word… your own words might do what your madness conjured up.'[11]

As we can see from this excerpt, the spoken word becomes reality, and discourse becomes action as the magical power of speech becomes akin to an incantation. In this case, jealousy made the woman see, and she unwittingly saw what the other two did not, thereby pointing out the possibility of love. The ending of the short story also merits closer inspection, as the daughter, Lea, informs Jeney, the husband of her mother, that she would marry another young man.

And she calmly, simply told Jeney that she would marry Vass.

'It is your wish too, is it not?' she asked softly, waiting.

'Yes, Lea, it is my wish too.' He took her hands in his, and she – had he said he wanted her dead – would have obliged him gladly. But he said no such thing. He simply held onto her hands, and then suddenly embraced her yielding body, and kissing her, he whispered in her hair,

'I want this, too…'

Six weeks later, Lea married, simply, calmly and unhappily.[12]

The last sentences of the short story are hauntingly similar to the discourse of Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* (1909) with its indifferent, uneventful narration of women's lives. Basically, all statements are objective, albeit with an uncommon word order – multiple adverbs following the predicate –, and the circumstances are

11 – Hazudtok… hát csakugyan igaz… hát csakugyan szeretitek…
– Hallgass, ki ne mondd! – suttogta a férfi elfojtottan, megragadta az asszony karját és lenyomta a pamlagra. – Ne mondd ki! Mert ahogy a féltékenységed megmutatta azt, ami… lehetne…úgy lehet, hogy a kimondott szó… a saját szavad valósággá teszi, amit az őrjöngésed kigondolt.' Ritoók, *Négyen a tűz körül* [Four Around the Fire], 46.

12 És megmondta nyugodtan, egyszerűen Jeneynek, hogy feleségül megy Vasshoz.
– Maga is ezt óhajtja, ugyebár? –kérdezte halkan, várakozással.
Igen, Lea, én is ezt óhajtom. – Megfogta a leány mindkét kezét, aki – ha most azt mondta volna, hogy a halált óhajtja – abba is beleegyezik. De nem mondta. Csak nem bocsátotta el a kezét, aztán egyszerre magához szorította ellenállás nélküli testét és csókjai közt a hajába suttogta:
– Én is ezt akarom…
Hat hét múlva Lea férjhez ment, egyszerűen, nyugodtan, boldogtalanul.' Ritoók, *Négyen a tűz körül* [Four Around the Fire], 47.

described only after a fact had been stated, only to have supplementary statements undermine the previous statement. Take, for example, how the repetition of *simply*, *calmly* frames Lea's *calm and simple* announcement, and could serve as an overall framework for the text in-between, except for the fact that the frame is imperfect because *calm* and *simple* are reversed in the repetition, which could be repetition, emphasis, or even inversion. The framework is further undone by the last word *unhappily*, which lengthens the frame, reaching beyond the closed structure. The word itself is an addition, an amendment to the completely closed whole, thus questioning the unity of the single closed unit. In this way *unhappily* undermines, semantically and rhetorically, the narrative voice that sums up the woman's fate with an indifference informed by fate and history. In this light, the 'love constructing' nature of the piano scene is foregrounded, because it is not about two people instinctively attracted to one another, but their recognizing themselves in the basic patterns of their culture, and behaving, even feeling, accordingly.

Rereading the text, we can focus more on cliché elements, and can even read the lines in a way that challenges the narrative viewpoint, because much like the question of fictionality, the idea of love is also a relevant notion that points beyond modernity to the postmodern. We see that love is more than attraction arising between two people – it is the appropriation of inherited cultural behavioral patterns, and the ability to identify with these patterns. Therefore, it is the moment of handing over the fallen music sheet that creates love in this scenario.

> As the girl suddenly lowered the music rack, the sheets slipped off with a flat rustle. Jeney reached for them and gave them back. They looked at each other, a long look, and in the last moment, their eyes gleamed with terror.
>
> 'Impossible', thought the girl. 'Impossible', reasoned the man… and at that moment,
>
> they clearly felt the great, tragic possibility that mad jealousy had alerted them to, and which was now beyond their power to ignore.[13]

Upon rereading this scene, we may think of many similar scenes from Hungarian and foreign literature alike, making us doubt even great love stories, and allowing us to take an ironic stance towards Jeney's lonely nights when he yearns and

13 A füzet tompa zajjal csúszott le, amint a leány hirtelen leeresztette a kottatartót. Jeney utána hajolt és visszaadta. Egymásra néztek, egy kicsit hosszasabban és azt utolsó pillanatban nagy rémület csillant fel a szemükben.
– Lehetetlen, – gondolta a leány. – Lehetetlen – bizonykodott a férfi magában… és épen akkor világosan érezték azt a nagy, megrázó lehetőséget, amire egy esztelen féltékenység felhívta a figyelmüket s amire lehetetlen volt többé nem gondolni. Ritoók, *Négyen a tűz körül* [Four Around the Fire], 45.

thinks of Lea. 'He thought of Lea – her figure, her eyes, her hair, first separately, and then of her whole, sweet, lovely youth that enveloped her as naturally as air, and was, by nature, the missing half to his.'[14]

Semantically, placing *separately* after the enumeration of body parts seems superfluous, since the very act of enumeration and foregrounding details allows us to deduce that he thought of them separately. The original Hungarian term, *külön-külön* is also a repetition, and can therefore be understood as an exaggeration or hyperbole. When the enumeration continues, it follows the logic of how objects of desire emerge, and *separately* points out this physical desire, especially when the beauty of youth is also mentioned side by side – which allows us to reinterpret the final parting scene.

In the parting scene, embracing the yielding body, and touching her hair and saying, 'I want this, too…' can also mean physical desire, and *this, too* can also mean the girl's yielding body, rather than her decision to marry another. Finally, in the last sentence, the repetition of *simple* and *calm* denotes an endless stream of marriages without passion or desire, naturalizing them, speaking not only of the irreversible tragedy of a bad decision, but also of the century-old cultural narrative of the relationship between marriage, stifling desires, and women's fate.

Subjectivity Projected Onto Objects

Coming back to Kaffka's magnum opus *Colors and Years*, we may wonder what remains with the protagonist throughout her lifetime of losses, and the answer is some old brown furniture and the flowers – 'Red hollyhocks, mallows, bleeding hearts, tutsans, resedas, ladies' slippers'. These are the things that remained with her throughout life, and offer her a sense of stability in change as objects onto which she can project her personality. She never asks herself the question 'Who am I?', which also prevents her from asking 'What am I capable of?', because the preprogrammed life pattern of advancing in life through marriage shrouds this possibility. The protagonist's feminine subjectivity is thus projected onto objects – she identifies herself with the flowers, but more importantly, this identification is not with flowers in general, but several kinds of flowers at the same time. In this case, enumeration, a very characteristic trope of Kaffka's literary language, emphasizes the colorfulness and individuality of feminine subjectivity. One evident gesture of the character's identification with the flowers is the enumeration

14 'Leára gondolt, az alakjára, a szemére, a hajára, külön-külön s aztán az egész édes szép fiatalságára, ami úgy vette körül természetesen, mint a levegő s ami az övének természettől a párja volt.' Ritoók, *Négyen a tűz körül* [Four Around the Fire], 45.

showing her despair upon the death of her husband – 'Then, life clashed above my head, hacked me to shreds, made me miserable, *tore me from my stem*, pushed me out of my place in the world, threw me away, pulled the ground from under me, the shelter from above my head'.[15] (Emphases mine.)

Other examples of feminine subjectivities that cannot be expressed in words, and must therefore be projected onto objects, are *Anna Édes* [Édes Anna] by Kosztolányi, or the character Erzsi in Ritoók's *Quiet Life* [Csendes élet]. When the chimney sweeper proposes to Anna Sweet, he invites her over to their house to show her around, and shows her the room looking to the garden. Anna has no inkling of what awaits her, but as she examines the objects, what causes her to feel joy is perhaps a glimpse of a promising future – we do not know this for certain, of course, as the narration hints at the limits of narrative competence.

> The room was full of things. Two large cupboards, two beds together with bedding, all the necessaries, a settee, a kitchen cabinet, a table. Mr. Báthory opened the cupboards. He showed her the white linen, washed and apparently untouched – six blouses, three underskirts, three nightgowns – one bright-red Himalayian scarf. He spoke to her with great respect. Anna fell to thinking and a faint thrill of happiness ran through her. (1991:148)[16] (Translation by György Szirtes)

Most of the paragraph consists of enumerating objects as we gaze through Mr. Báthory and Anna and take in everything, our new knowledge informed by earlier parts of the text about Anna's meager wardrobe. The enumeration thus reveals that Anna's quality of life will change drastically from what she experienced at the Vizy family.

Similarly, when Erzsi, the last descendant of a noble family, now living in poverty, looks at the furniture in Ritoók's *Quiet Life* [Csendes élet], she decides that she shall marry a peasant, an act which will fundamentally alter her identity.

> 'Suddenly, she stopped at the door – she thought she heard the dry, impatient thump of a walking stick from within. She hastily opened the door, and the room was, of course,

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15 Akkor összecsapott felettem az élet, roncsokba darabolt, összenyomorított, tövemről szakított, világban való helyemről kimozdított, messze dobott, kihúzta talpam alól a földet, fejem felöl a fedelet.' Margit Kaffka, *Színek és évek*, (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1973 [1911]), 145.

16 Sok holmi volt itt. Két ágy, ágyneműkkel, mindennel, ami kell, egy dívány egy konyhakredenc, egy asztal. Báthory úr kinyitotta a szekrényeket. Mutogatta az asszony fehérneműit, melyek kimosva, mintegy érintetlenül álltak ott: hat ing, három alsószoknya, három hálórékli, egy piros himalájakendő. Nagy tisztelettel, becsüléssel beszélt vele. Anna gondolkozott, s valami bágyadt kis öröm villant át rajta. Dezső Kosztolányi, *Édes Anna*, (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1974 [1926]), 134.

empty. And yet she had been hearing that thump by the armchair over and over these days, though that haggard hand was now resting below the ground. How strange this room looks now! It isn't even hers by right, just by pity. The furniture will be good enough for the new house – she will take the armchair, too […].

She missed having someone to care for, and she waited gladly for autumn, to be her own mistress again. She wanted a garden with flowers, two cows and lots of small animals.'(Ritoók 38–39.)[17]

From the exclamation, *How strange this room looks now!*, there is a discursive switch to a kind of free indirect speech, where the character's direct thoughts are narrated without marking the narrator's presence ('thought that', 'thought', etc.). Exclamations are features of free indirect speech, while alignment is that of indirect speech, narrating the thoughts as they are, and following the line of thought as gleaning from the character's personality, as if the character had spoken. The only feature reminding us that these thoughts are narrated, rather than quoted, is the use of the third person (*hers* instead of *mine*, *she will take* instead of *I will take*) – such switches are common in Ritoók's prose, as she allows a glimpse into the character's mind for a few moments, and then distances the readers once again.

From the girl's perspective, her own home becomes alien to her, and when she takes the old furniture to the new house, she basically transports it across cultures by translating, or reinterpreting the furniture, which one could understand as a metonymy of her home, herself and her surroundings. She reinterprets and reformulates her identity, projecting it onto objects, and in this process the armchair stands out from among the rest because the formidable grandmother, who guarded the reputation of the Korponay family, can no longer occupy it. However, her memory shall not be left behind because the girl does not want to part with her, being the only person who ever cared for her – thus the objectified memory of the grandmother is transferred to another culture, devalued perhaps, but still enriching the girl's lowly station in life.

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17 Egyszerre megállt az ajtó előtt. Mintha egy bot száraz, türelmetlen kopogását hallaná onnan belülről. Hirtelen benyitott. Persze, hogy üres volt a szoba. De napok óta hányszor hallotta azt a kopogást onnan a karosszék mellől, mintha a kiaszott kéz nem feküdne már odakint a földben. Milyen idegen így ez a szoba! Nem is az övé, csak kegyelemből. Ez a pár bútor jó lesz az új házba, a karosszéket is elviszi […].
Hiányzott a napjaiból, hogy nincs kiről gondoskodnia és szívesen várta az őszt, hogy a maga asszonya legyen. Virágos udvart akart, meg két tehenet és sok-sok aprójószágot. Ritoók, *Négyen a tűz körül* [Four Around the Fire], 38–39.

The armchair now crosses boundaries the way words cross from one linguistic culture to another, and parts with the world of nobles to cross into the world of peasants, and as a noble relic, it enriches the poor, and thus retains some of its noble identity. The rest of the short story also makes clear that this newly forged feminine identity is difficult to categorize, and remains unexpressed and marked only by objects – she adds a flower garden, two cows and lots of small animals to the furniture and armchair, but all these subtle touches have very little effect on her. In this light, a later sentence, *I do not belong here*, can also be reinterpreted in several ways – this is her proud rejection in response to András Korponay's inquiry, but it can also be seen as an unconscious slip of the tongue, betraying a sense of nobility, and perhaps that is why the man tips his hat to her. However, it can also hint at a feminine voice stuck outside the category that is only able to express its situation through negativity, and can only situate herself by stating where she does not belong.

In Kosztolányi's text, narration is more distant, leaving open the question of whether we see the character from an outside or inside viewpoint with *a faint thrill of happiness ran through her*, while in Ritoók's case, it is the narrator who steps out and the character's statement disrupts the narration. Whereas Kosztolányi's text marks the boundaries of narrator and narration, clearly leaving the narrator in control of the story, Ritoók's text marks the disruption quite clearly, because she reaches the point of disrupting the narration, and erasing the starting narrative frame.

We may deduce from the examples above that the feminine narrative subject mapped itself in a historical perspective and operated with very relevant notions of the subject as early as the first half of the twentieth century. It reaches towards the postmodern horizon with its impersonal narration of women's fate, self-consciousness expressed through objects, and in prewritten roles that have no essential femininity, and contains within itself the realization of linguistic and cultural antecedence.

From Personal toward Impersonal Voices: The Poetry and Embroidery of Anna Lesznai

In the final part of this chapter, I examine the issue of feminine subjectivity by comparing poet, writer and artist Anna Lesznai's embroidery designs from the 1910's with her poems written in the same decade. Similarly to previously examined works, these poems also exhibit the duality of centered and decentered subjectivity. My analysis aims to trace the frequently emerging process of a subjective voice characteristic of a coherent subject transforming into a scattered

and impersonal voice characteristic of a decentered subject through the progression of the poem.

In the chosen poems, I examine the poetic functions of subject and object as well as the personal and impersonal articulations enabled by these functions while calling attention to the idea that these tropes can be connected to the identity constructs of feminine prose examined in the previous chapters. In my comparison of the chosen verbal and visual works, I do not examine interdisciplinary phenomena such as visual description or visual narrative; instead I focus on comparable concepts and the analysis of identical visual and logical conceptions including the interplay of foreground and background, the issues of subject, object and subjectivity and the designation of subject positions for the reader. As in the previously examined works, the duality of centered and decentered subjectivities also emerges in the chosen poems from the 1910's.

Writer, poet, critic, painter and artisan Anna Lesznai was an unparalleled phenomenon of the artistic circles of the early twentieth century. Her embroideries, book cover designs and illustrations were just as successful as her volumes of poetry and fairy tales, and she was one of the few women alongside Margit Kaffka whose writing was regularly featured in the literary journal West [Nyugat]. She joined the Hungarian Sociological Association through Oszkár Jászi, her husband for six years and good friend until his death, while her friendship with Béla Balázs led her to the Sunday Circle [Vasárnapi Kör]. Anna Lesznai also held correspondence with Béla Bartók and lively intellectual debates with György Lukács. She participated in the representative exhibition of The Eights [Nyolcak], a progressive group of painters founded in 1909, and designed covers for the volumes of Endre Ady and Béla Balázs as well as music sheets of Béla Bartók (Szabadi 1978: 22). Neither has her work sunk into oblivion like that of her contemporary female peers – she is still mentioned in relation to The West and the Sunday Circle, even if her artistic work has not been subjected to significant critical inquiry. Erzsébet Vezér wrote a monograph of her literary career in 1979, Judit Szilágyi (2011) published her updated biography and Petra Török conducted research on her artisan work (2001, 2011). Török observes on the basis of one of Lesznai's letters to György Lukács that by the 1910's, Anna Lesznai was receiving commissions to design and produce samples. She produced pillows, tablecloths, hangings, wall protectors and bed covers in large numbers. 'When examining the estate of Lesznai preserved in Hatvan, we find hundreds of embroidery designs with floral ornamentation from the 1910's. […] In these continuous designs consisting of rhythmically repeated motifs, we find the dominance of a single element also mentioned by Lesznai in the title of the design ('rose', 'pine-needle',

'pine', 'acorn and leaf', 'mahleb cherry'), framed by leaves and intertwined twigs. […] Another type of design features a vase or goblet as the base from which the composition bursts forward and the title of the design is based on its color ('black and white vase', 'yellow rose vase', 'black basket', 'blue vase'). The motif of the goblet, vase or the *jardinières* of stone railings dominates the early embroidery designs of Lesznai. This is the element that holds the composition together, from which stems the miraculous bouquet of flowers, fruit, leafy branches and vines. This flower bouquet, its root and the plants emerging from a goblet, vase or – in rare instances – cornucopia often evoke associations with the mystical world tree' (Török 2001: 22–23).

In the poem *Of My Other Kind of Heart* [Másfajta szívemről] we find one possible interpretation of floral compositions emerging from receptacles.

> Because I love the green
> Fields of Leszna over you.
> The glorious garden that
> Like a bowl richly laden
> With fat, ripened fruit,
> And a million blooming flowers,
> The hill bears to the sky.[18]

As we can see above, floral fruit compositions are closely connected to the *garden*, a frequent metaphor in the poetry of Anna Lesznai just as the Garden of Eden. The loss of one's childhood and their recreation are recurring images in her earlier poetry. We could say that following an artisan logic, the subject is multiplied and we witness the returning of the return in her poetry. It is important to note, however, that the subject of the garden (of Eden) is not only continuously repeated but also reinterpreted as the garden metaphor spreads through her work like a web and enters into dialogue with earlier poems to offer countless interpretive possibilities. For example, one of the most frequent motifs alongside references to childhood is the emergence of biblical context:

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18 Mert jobban szeretem nálad
A zöld lesznai tájat.
A tarka díszű kertet
Melyet mint rakott tálat,
Dús gyümölccsel kevertet,
Sokszínű dús virággal,
Nyújt ég felé a domb. GERGELY, Tibor: *Lesznai Képeskönyv. Lesznai Anna írásai, képei és hímzése* [Lesznai in Images: The Writing, Art and Embroidery of Anna Lesznai] (Budapest: Corvina, 1978), 21.

My body lay crucified in man's embrace
The blows of his kisses shattering my soul
You bid me come forth to your Shrine, oh Lord
And commanded me to answer with my blood.
But I, oh Lord, do not like blood
I love the grassy garden of Eden…
Oh Lord, please let me go home.[19]

'Lay crucified' evokes the illusion of the *cross* as the narrator identifies with the role of Christ, while the second part of the poem voices an oppositional viewpoint to the will of God. In the Hungarian original, 'I' ('én') appears twice and the vowel 'é' appears multiple times in a way that echoes and intensifies the presence of 'én'. The argument attempts to construct another I, to show that the narrator is incapable of fulfilling the command of God because her nature is different from what is expected of an executor of the divine will. The juxtaposition of 'Én Éden' ('I' and 'Eden') in the Hungarian original receives special emphasis that allows the meanings of the two words to approximate one another and expand the possible meanings of the subject emerging from the poem.

The metaphor of the garden and its associated imagery evoke multiple variations of the idea of love, bodies, female sexuality and fertility:

Autumn Words
When you're not with me: my lips
Bear heavy kisses,
Fruit forgotten on the branches
In a garden blushing in loneliness.[20]

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19 Mert testem feszült ember ölelésén
S csókok pőrölye törte fel a lelkem,
Szentélyed elé rendeltél Uram
És parancsoltad, hogy vérrel feleljek.
De én, Uram, nem szeretem a vért
Én Éden füves kertjét szeretem…
Engedd Uram, hogy hazamenjek. GERGELY, Tibor: *Lesznai Képeskönyv. Lesznai Anna írásai, képei és hímzése* [Lesznai in Images: The Writing, Art and Embroidery of Anna Lesznai] (Budapest: Corvina, 1978), 20.

20 *Őszi szavak*
Mert nem vagy nálam: ajkamon
Súlyosan érnek csókjaim,
Sok ágon feledett gyümölcs
Magánossá piroslott kertben. Anna Lesznai, *Dolgok öröme* [The Joy of Things] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1985), 29.

The Garden
[…] For blessed is the virgin who wandered in exile
And reaches the garden of her lover as a woman.
Finds her soul on the bosom of her lover
Finds her garden on the bosom of her lover
[…] My love, my garden, will we at last be one,
In full bloom among all gardens?[21]

After the noteworthy start in the form of Anna Lesznai's first volume *Homecoming Poems* [Hazajáró versek] (1909), it is in her second volume *Garden of Eden* [Édenkert] (1909) and her third volume *Lost Litanies* [Eltévedt litániák] (1922) where Lesznai's lyrical discourse truly unfolds. As observed by Erzsébet Vezér, her poetry combines a fairy tale perspective and a pantheistic view of nature with the complete dissolution of the lyrical persona (1979: 36). One of the most characteristic starting points of her poems is the narrator evoking the illusion of subjectivity only for the reader to gradually discover that the voice speaking to us is a non-human voice, an echo resonating from a million points of nature. In other words, there is a transfer of voice and a voicing of nature without giving it a face,[22] playfully misleading the reader who expects the appearance of someone

21 *A kert*
[…] Mert áldott a szűz, ki száműzött sejtő, bolyongott
S asszonnyá érve kedvese kertjébe ér.
Kedvese keblén ébred lelke magára,
Kedvese keblén ébred kertjére ő
[…] Kedvesem, kertem, egyek leszünk-e végre,
Teljesedettek minden kertek közül? Lesznai, *Dolgok öröme* [The Joy of Things], 46.

22 This special poetic situation poses a limit on one of the important tenets of Paul de Man's 'Autobiography as De-Facement', according to which voicing the inanimate and imbuing it with the ability to speak through the transfer of the voice also entails the conferring of face. The author equates the giving of voice to the giving or taking away of face, through which the trope of prosopopeia can emerge as a trope of autobiography: 'We can identify the figure that completes the central metaphor of the sun and thus completes the tropological spectrum that the sun engenders: it is the figure of prosopopeia, the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech. *Voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face,* a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*)' DE MAN, Paul: *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 75–76. (Emphases mine.) The argument that 'Voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face' is not applicable to Lesznai's case where the inanimate does speak through a transfer of voice but at the same time its humanity is frozen and its face is taken away. Voice does not assume automatically personality

but instead receives a reinterpretation of the rhetorical subject. We can trace several forms of the emergence of impersonality, the voicing of natural phenomena or an abstract world of forms where the transformation of the essence of the lyrical subject is a background event, a meta-narrative fiction of the poem. The following poem is a typical example:

Of My Other Kind of Heart
Do not bow to my words
When I speak nice and low.
Do not believe in writhing
Don't trust your yearning, no…

Because I love the green
Fields of Leszna over you.
The glorious garden that
Like a bowl richly laden
With fat, ripened fruit,
And a million blooming flowers,
The hill bears to the sky. (Translation by Éva Misits)[23]

As we progress, the image of a human figure talking to their lover is transformed as their feelings for nature become so overwhelming they exceed human measure and the lyrical subject grows to completely distance itself from a human perspective.

[…] The herd kicks up more
Of life's sacred dust
Than what you could read onto me

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with face, as de Man claims. Voice can appear as an impersonal sound as well: a good example for this is the examined poem by Anna Lesznai.

23 *Másfajta szívemről*
Ne hajts az én szavamra
Ha szépen szólok s lágyan.
Ne higgy a vergődésben
Ne bizz a vágyódásban…
Mert jobban szeretem nálad
A zöld lesznai tájat.
A tarka díszű kertet,
Melyet mint rakott tálat,
Dús gyümölccsel kevertet,
Sokszínű dús virággal,
Nyújt ég felé a domb. Lesznai, *Dolgok öröme* [The Joy of Things], 24.

With a man's poor words
Than what you could kiss onto me
With a man's poor lips
From life's joyous lust.[24]

The Joy of Things
I stop in the night, in the water of the homecoming moon:
Here by the goose-bumped branches, where loose flowers grow…
No space between you and me: fruits of the world, things,
No space, no relations, just happy touching of one another.
We stand firmly in our places: matchboxes of
Little houses, trees and cattle with green wooden bases.
Our fates are beside each other, our own soles our order.
Human lives strung for a cause out of an ancient reason
Your hissing clasps break off my heart…
Reasonless peace around me, nothing reaches into me
To tear me out of myself and carry me off towards others.
Oh! The firm world of forms, hard-shelled roundness:
A temple built within me, I stop inside you.
Around me things are vessels for separate joys
Yet inside our bosoms the same heart is beating.[25] (Translation by Éva Misits)

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24 …Többet ver fel a csorda
Az élet szent porából,
Mint amit rám olvashatsz
Szegény emberszavakkal
Mint amit rám csókolhatsz
Szegény emberajakkal
Az élet mámorából. Lesznai, *Dolgok öröme* [The Joy of Things], 24.

25 *Dolgok öröme*
Megállok az éjben, hazatérő holdnak vizében:
Itt van a fák lúdbőrző ága, feslett virágok nyílnak …
Tér nincs köztetek s köztem: világ gyümölcsei, dolgok,
Tér nincs, viszony nincs, csak boldog egymáshoz érés.
Biztosan állunk helyünkön: játék-iskatulának
Kirakott házai, fái, barmai zöld fatalappal.
Egymás mellett a sorsunk, önnön talpunk a rend.
Ősokból célba feszített emberi élet
Sziszegő abroncsod íme szívemről lepattant…
Köröttem oktalan béke, nem nyúl semmi belém
Hogy kitépve engem magamból sodorna mások felé.
Ó! formák biztos világa, keményhéjú kerek:
Magamban épült templom, benned megállok.
Körülöttem a dolgok tartályai külön örömeknek

In the poem *The Joy of Things* [Dolgok öröme], we start from the usual departure point of the speaking subject and their environment (*I stop in the night, in the water of the homecoming moon / Here by the goose-bumped branches, where loose flowers grow*) and then through the fusion of subject and object (*No space between you and me: fruits of the world, things / No space, no relations, just happy touching of one another*), we arrive at a reinterpretation of the subject (*Reasonless peace around me, nothing reaches into me / To tear me out of myself and carry me off towards others*). In the process, the personal pronouns 'me' and 'myself' ['engem' and 'magam' in the Hungarian original], words that are supposed to refer to the same person are placed in sharp opposition to one another, while the self-identified image of the self suggested by reference to 'others' is contrasted to an image of the self that identifies with the things of the world, comes to impersonate the impersonal and thereby loses its own subjectivity. However, the indistinguishable meanings of 'me' and 'myself' also blur these oppositions until we arrive at concepts that transform into one another and become difficult to separate – in other words, the subject first dissolves into everything by distancing itself from self-identified subjectivity and then absorbs that subjectivity into itself.

We can trace similar conceptions of the subject discussed above regarding one of the female characters in Cecile Tormay's novel *People of the Rocks* [Emberek a kövek között]:

> She no longer protested the idea that the mountains ended in the unknown distance, after all, it only made her love them more… She looked up at them through her tears and they suddenly seemed cracked and melted as though they were coming to her above the pine groves, as if they wanted to pour into her through her eyes. And then, as she lay there sunk to the ground, she felt as though her heart was beating below among the rocks instead of her chest, it was her blood that pulsed in the small springs in the moss, it was her breath that slowly, slowly rustled the alpine grass in the clearing.[26]

S mindenikünk kebelében mégis egy szív dobog. Lesznai, *Dolgok öröme* [The Joy of Things], 55.

26 Nem lázongott többé, hogy az ismeretlen messzeségben végük van a hegyeknek, mert hiszen így jobban lehetett őket szeretni… Könnyein át felnézett rájuk. Mintha egyszerre megtörtek, megolvadtak volna, mintha jönnének hozzá a fenyvesek felett, mintha a szemén át bele akarnának ömleni. És ekkor, amint ott feküdt a földhöz tapadva, úgy érezte, hogy a szíve nem is az ő mellében ver, hanem alatta a kövek között; úgy érezte, hogy az ő vére hajtja a kis források lüktetését a mohában, az ő lélegzete rezgeti lassan, lassan az irtásban a havasi füvet. Cecile Tormay, *Emberek a kövek között* [People of the Rocks] (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1911), 61–62.

We can see an analogous concept to the one discussed above in Anna Lesznai's embroideries and embroidery designs from the 1910's. For instance, in the center of the embroidery *Bizarre* [Bizarr 1914][27] (Image no. 1), we see a vase with flowers, and if we assume the sameness of image and embroidery and thus suppose this to be the subject of the image, we will note that the subject and its background are blurred together to a point where it becomes unclear whether the purple petals of the flower belong to the subject of the image or to its background. The boundaries and outlines are emphasized in a way that we cannot tell what it intends to separate while the forms and colors of the flower in the middle appear on other parts of the image as well. One may draw parallels between this arrangement and the poetic phenomenon of parts of the central I-figure appearing in the environment, or the fact that the central figure itself is difficult to delineate due to its shifting and transformed boundaries.

At first glance, *Bizarre* seems like the interior of a room with a vase on the carpet and two chair-like pieces of furniture next to it, which could also be considered some kind of fruit at first glance. This would lead us from the room to the outside, calling into question the separation of outside and inside once again since the inside is already outside and the outside is already inside. Another characteristic of these embroideries is that the main subject is built up of the exact same colors as the background, and if the subject of the image cannot be clearly distinguished or the very subject itself becomes an ambiguous concept, this could even destabilize the relationship between the viewing subject and image as beheld object. The beheld subject(lessness) can also affect the viewer as subject and thus shake the foundations of an interpretive position that assumes a coherent subjectivity.

Just like in *Bizarre*, it is also difficult to determine whether the subject of *Ady Pillow* [Ady-párna][28] *(Image no. 2)* is flowers in a vase or a vase in a flowery background. The green leaves of the flower in the vase appear in other parts of the image as do the yellow flowers, while the twisting vines give the impression of movement. The resulting embroidery seems both two-dimensional and three-dimensional – the vase seems to bend as though it were moving towards us in space. In other words, this piece also dislodges the fixed position of image and viewer.

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27 Tibor Gergely, *Lesznai Képeskönyv. Lesznai Anna írásai, képei és hímzése* [Lesznai in Images: The Writing, Art and Embroidery of Anna Lesznai], 63.

28 Gergely, *Lesznai Képeskönyv. Lesznai Anna írásai, képei és hímzése* [Lesznai in Images: The Writing, Art and Embroidery of Anna Lesznai], 73.

One possible way of interpreting the embroidery *The Pear Tree* [A körtefa][29] (image no. 3) is to approach it from the perspective of frames: just like the works examined before, the multiple frames of the piece raise the issue of the relationship between subject and environment. Multiplication may circumscribe the subject and enhance its significance, but it can also call it into question since the borders themselves become dubious when it is unclear where the frame or the subject begins. The figure standing in the inner circle is just as difficult to read as the subjects of the other images since the figure of the tree can barely be made out in the background. In addition, the parts beyond the framing circle reframe the circles with the same colors as those of the pear tree while the same leaf shapes that can be seen on the pear tree also appear in the periphery.

One may draw interesting parallels between Anna Lesznai's poetry of gardens or the Garden of Eden and the concept of *écriture féminine* ('women's writing') in French feminism. By developing Derrida's concept of *écriture* ('writing'), this theory attempts to break free from the male vs. female opposition established by our logocentric language culture where the quality of 'feminine' can only be determined by men. Women's writing seeks to return to the maternal language before symbolic language use, a phase in which mother and child are in perfect harmony and the individual has not yet entered the order of the father and stepped onto the path of mastering a language culture that promotes men. It is thus an imagined returning to the preoedipal phase, the fictive articulation of French feminism's perspective on language. As for the parallel, the world Lesznai creates is very closed off and builds from a handful of recurring visual elements such as the objects of nature, the garden, mountains, foliage, hills, the sky, the earth, flowers or the female body. The repetition of these words is a striking feature of her poetry that directs attention to language itself and leads us to suspect the development of a unique language with its own separate vocabulary in this net of consistent, self-referencing, self-reliant repetitions. The poet captures the pain of the lost Eden again and again with stubborn consistency, reinterpreting, rewriting, subverting and dismantling the notion of the garden and thereby reinterpreting the relationship between the 'I' and the garden, outside and inside. The lyrical subject emerging in the poem extends until it covers the outside environment and finally becomes identical with the garden, and this return, the evocation of paradise and the reliving of childhood as well as admitting the impossibility of returning suggests a view similar to that of *écriture féminine*. The human body melts into the environment and accepts the landscape into the

29 Gergely, 77.

realm of the human as these emphatically rhythmic, free verse-like utterances unbound by poetic form and structure create a self-governing, closed world that, just like the philosophy of *écriture féminine*, attempts to tear away from preestablished cultural constructs.

Approaching Anna Lesznai's work from the perspective of *écriture féminine* as shown above is further justified by the fact that her embroideries and poems are related and offer interpretations of each other, thus realizing the close connection of the needle and the pen. While the genre of embroidery is traditionally considered to be a feminine activity, recent research has shown that it only seemingly fulfilled the function of keeping women inside the household, away from the public sphere. Studying the situation of rich British women in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, Peter Stallybrass concludes that women's needlework created a sort of anti-discourse through which women had written their own history into our cultural memories in material form. They consistently and astutely revised or embroidered over the requirements of the dichotomies that sought to contain them, the compulsory separation of needle and pen, knowledge and beauty, creation and housework, private and public. According to the study, it was considered reprehensible at them if instead of using a needle or taking up a pen instead of a needle, a woman attempted to do both implied activities at once due to the fact that it was considered important to keep them strictly separated (2000: 160).

From this perspective, an interpretation that suggests the combination of embroidery and poetry to be akin to *écriture féminine* is all the more justified, from which we may conclude that poetry which creates a language with its own unique vocabulary from its own (re)sources is far more deeply interwoven by issues of femininity than if it were to foreground love, the female body, fertility or female sexuality. Just like in the embroideries examined above, the subject fills the entire space and blends into the background until the subject of the poems swallows its own language environment as a testament to the idea that feminine creation can only be articulated together with the creation of a feminine language.

In this chapter, the examined pieces clearly show that women writers foreground a strikingly different side of femininity from contemporary sociological or political discourse on women (such as education or the right to vote), allowing us to witness women's struggles to establish an identity not only in the face of society or men but also within themselves. The characters and narrators do not seem to have the slightest inkling that an image of femininity could be articulated independently of discourses of history and power. This means that the literary emergence of feminine self-interpretation shows several signs that

could be interpreted as decentered constructions of the subject as early as the first decades of the twentieth century. Here we find conceptions of the subject that emphasize its preceded position, a place already marked by public social discourses. For this reason, it is often unclear whom the piece is about, especially in cases where the text narrates the transformation of processes rather than individual human lives.

According to the classic argumentation by Teresa de Lauretis (1984: 119), every narrative that seeks to end in cognition and self-cognition basically repeats the question posed by King Oedipus, 'Who am I?', and follows an Oedipal logic in its progress from the loss of an initial ideal state towards resolution. At the same time, arriving at a resolution also entails that the protagonist and the reader achieve self-cognition as subjects, thereby solidifying and legitimating the idea of a coherent, self-identified (masculine) subject. In contrast, the women writers examined in this chapter resist the concept of a narrative that ends in feminine self-realization – they do not imagine alternative lives or dream of an ideal fate for women. The majority of these women writers instead focus women's fate as such by asking the questions 'who am I?' and 'who are women?', which both entail a centered subject, but resisting the desire of the reader to progress towards a solution and refusing to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. Instead of a self-realizing narrative, we see the expansion of the narrative framework and the possibilities of narrative language. The tropes of enumeration, the blurred boundaries between external and internal focalization, narrator and character, the recognition of social roles as formative of individuals and the frequent occurrence of impersonal narration without a narrator all work towards the emergence of a decentered feminine subjectivity that is aware of its precedence and emphasizes openness and the maintenance of processes rather than the closed concepts we desire to achieve. As such, the works examined do evoke the concept of the coherent subject and a self-realizing, individualistic self image by posing the question of 'who are women?', but this image is slowly transformed into a decentered conception of identity through the narrative process and the involvement of the reader.

Chapter 3: Narrative Conceptions of Identity and Otherness in the Works of Contemporary Hungarian Female Writers

In this chapter, I examine the manifestations of feminine subjectivity and feminine writing in the prose of contemporary women writers with a continued focus on how feminine prose is able to denote a strong yet fragmented subjectivity and how it is able to claim and refute the possibility of a unique feminine language – this time in contemporary Hungarian literature. In order to study feminine writing that speaks of the history of the (discursive) vulnerability of femininity, I examine literature that foregrounds the relationship of femininity and language.

As I have mentioned in previous chapters, one of the most important differences between feminist criticism and postmodern theories lies in their conceptions of the subject; therefore, I focus on how the writing of contemporary Hungarian women writers resolves this contradiction or raises further questions. The starting point of my analysis is the claim of deconstructionist feminist criticism that logocentric language and thinking as well as a language culture built on dichotomies had suppressed all feminine perspectives and articulations that defined themselves outside the relationship between men and women and the oppositions pertaining to them. Following the logic of deconstruction and psychoanalysis, theories of feminine writing (*écriture feminine*) in French feminist criticism have pointed out how assumptions about and discrimination towards women have become so firmly entrenched in Western thinking that we internalize and reproduce the subordination of the feminine every day through our mother tongue (Irigaray 2004: 795–8).

I examine the ruptures, interruptions and omissions of prosaic language in contemporary Hungarian novels in search of traces or signs of the suppression of an alternative feminine perspective that lies beyond the boundaries of oppositional tropes, and in doing so, my aim is to provide a confrontational reading that allows the emergence of a discursive place able to articulate lost feminine voices no matter how fragmented or contradictory, or at the very least able to denote that which has already been lost. This chapter examines textual spaces rather than entire *oeuvres*, searching for spaces that *simultaneously* address the questions of feminine identity and language, and investigating the possibilities of voicing and hailing a subordinate femininity in the prose of Virág Erdős, Zsuzsa

Forgács, Viktória Köves, Alaine Polcz, Zsuzsa Rakovszky, Margit Halász and Noémi Szécsi.

Feminine Subjectivity

In postmodern culture, we speak of the decentering of the subject and question the idea of a self-identified personality, forcing the advocates of feminine identity into a difficult situation. They have to focus on this issue since conceptions of a coherent, unified self-realizing identity are becoming obsolete. However, in this chapter, my aim is to show how the works of women writers that focus our attention on the textual determinations of the subject are able to simultaneously maintain a decentered subject and a strong feminine identity, thereby maintaining their support of women's rights.

In several works of Virág Erdős, the narrative unfolds in the drawing process of the child; in other words, the story is sketched out and the drawing is created right in front of us. The narrative procedure of a child's sketching a drawing provides ample room for the imagination while at the same time the reader is obliged to fill the blank spaces of the narrative with uncomfortable assumptions. For instance, we only realize towards the middle of the short story *Mary* [*Mária*] in the volume *Courtyard* [Belső Udvar] that a puppy was born instead of a child, and in the stories *The Sky above Józsefváros* [Józsefváros felett az ég], *UFOs* [Ufók] and *Version* [Verzió], we are left to guess till the very end who the angel might be, the UFO or the poor man. In all three cases, we are faced with categories whose boundaries are constantly changing in the process of reading and new information leads to the continuous transformation of the object and subject of the text rather than to a closer definition of them. For example, the interpretive possibilities of 'UFOs' are gradually multiplied – we first learn that they eat celery, then that they travel by underground, communicate with horses and laser chickens, and then learn that sometimes they look like people and sometimes they do not. In the end, we discover that the mother of the narrator and the narrator themselves are UFOs – this way, the text may be referring to 'UFO' as Hungarian slang for everything that we call 'strange' (1998: 27).

The opening piece of Virág Erdős' volume *It's Good to Be* [*Lenni jó*] is a female portrait that frames the rest of the writing. The shape of the book itself is reminiscent of children's picture books, encouraging the reader to adopt a child's perspective. The relationship between child and woman is presented in a variety of ways in the volume where one recurring relationship is of mother and child and another is the woman as a human being forced into the role of a child.

Portrait
This is a woman.
Judging from the fact that it has no willie.
Even the Devil and the Greenmonkey have one.
Even Grandma has some sort of line sticking out of her.
All this has is a tummy and three small breasts.
It doesn't have legs either, only hands.
And even those are more like wings.
It's laughing even though it has no mouth.
Its eyes are red.
Its hair is so long it almost doesn't fit the page.
Purple streak on the tablecloth, you can shout if you want.
Said I, but you're not listening.
You are tugging at the pen.
If you tug it one more time, I'm going to break your hand off.
Wow, look at this, this one doesn't even have ears, just this strange-looking shit on its head.
Are these horns or what?
Boldizsár said that the strange-looking shit on its head is its crown.
That I am the Mother Queen and he is the king.
Told me to look, there he is, he just can't be seen very well.
Due to the fact that he is still inside my tummy, you see.
He is inside, but he can see everything.
He can see me and he can see others too.
On the top of the page is the same old black mess.
Maybe it's the sun. (Translation by Éva Misits)[30]

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30 *Portré*
Ez egy nő.
Onnan lehet gondolni, hogy nincsen fütyije.
Még az Ördögnek is van, de még a Zöldmajomnak is.
Még a Nagymamából is lóg valami vonal.
Ennek meg csak hasa van, meg három pici melle.
Lába sincs, csak keze.
Azok is inkább szárnyak.
Nevet, pedig nincsen szája.
Piros a szeme.
Olyan hosszú haja van, hogy majdnem ki se fér.
Lila csík az abroszon, lehet kiabálni.
Mondtam én, de nem figyelsz.
Rángatod a tollat.
Ha még egyszer rángatod, letöröm a kezedet.
Na nézd, ennek még füle sincs, csak ez az idétlen bizbasz a fején.
Szarvak ezek, vagy mik?

In *Portrait* [Portré], each line is a sentence in a series of curt statements that do not form a complete story or a coherent description. The periods at the end of lines seem to constitute ruptures rather than closures, as if each were a stroke of the pencil on the drawing that unfolds in the process of the narrative. Based on the first sentence of the poem, we would expect a female figure, calling to mind *A Woman* [Egy nő] by Péter Esterházy (2007), a volume that tells ninety-seven stories all starting with the statement 'There is a woman.'

The subject positions presented in *Portrait* are unclear. One cannot discern for certain who is talking and what they are talking about as neither the subject nor the object are fixed. Here we may speak instead of a constantly transforming subjectivity unfolding right in front of us in the artistic process of the drawing that we sometimes see from the child's point of view and sometimes from that of the mother. The line 'This is a woman.' is followed by an impersonal statement ('Judging') and then the description of the woman that could be articulated by a child or an adult, after which talk resumes in the mother's voice, forcing the reader to see the formulation of the child's drawing through her eyes. Eventually a picture emerges from the black and white lines with a black mess on top – a sketchy drawing, no more than a few scribbles. The phrase 'strange-looking shit' appears twice, a rude comment that does not fit our idealized image of mother and child and messes with the drawing. The poem focuses on feminine subjectivity, the woman, the mother and the relationship of mother and child in a way that allows the reader to participate in forming the image, letting us witness the continuous transformation of the image of the woman and see how mother and child draw the picture together and in opposition to one another. The writing resists readings that aim to resolve (and find definite closure) – by the time we assess what is going on in the poem, the text swings forward and creates a situation contradictory to what has been established before.

The lines 'Due to the fact that he is still inside my tummy, you see. / He is inside, but he can see everything.' might be referring to the first line; in that

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Azt mondja a Boldizsár, hogy az az idétlen bizbasz a fején, az a koronája.
Hogy én vagyok az Anyakirálynő, ő meg a király.
Nézzem, ott van ő is, csak persze nem nagyon lehet látni.
Benne van még a hasamban, tudniillik, azért.
Benne van, de mindent lát.
Engem is lát, mást is.
A lap tetején a szokásos, fekete gomoly.
Talán a nap. Virág Erdős, *Belső udvar* [Courtyards] (Budapest: JAK Kijárat, 1998), 7.

case the figure could be considered a fetus as seen during obstetric sonography, which in turn questions our conceptions of the child's drawing as the fundamental organizational trope of the poem. This may confuse the reader who can no longer be certain who and what the drawing might be about, and this uncertainty evokes assumptions and semi-conscious memories, leading the interpreter to acknowledge the unconscious elements in the formation of identities. The fact that the readers have to exert more and more effort to understand who the subject and object of discourse are forces them to consider subject positions as processes in motion rather than static attributes. This way, the exhausting struggle of identity formation becomes a constitutive reading experience.

In Zsuzsa Rakovszky's novel *The Shadow of the Snake* [A kígyó árnyéka], we see an autobiography articulated from a feminine perspective. The novel follows the life of Orsolya (Ursula) Lehmann in a more or less linear structure from childhood to old age; however, the formulation of the united subject, the emergence of the image of *Who am I* and *Who am I going to be* is constantly interrupted. At the age of sixteen, Orsolya Lehmann takes a thoughtless risk and becomes pregnant while her step-mother has a miscarriage. To salvage his daughter's situation, her father proposes that they move from Lőcse to Sopron where he and his new wife may raise his daughter's child as their own, but due to the sudden death of the step-mother and other complications, father and daughter are forced to present themselves in Sopron as a married couple. The identity narrative thus tells the story of a ruptured identity as Orsolya reads 'Ursula Lehmann', her own name, on her step-mother's tombcross, or when she unexpectedly meets an acquaintance from Lőcse in Sopron who no longer remembers exactly whom she is talking to:

> You lived in the house next to Landfeld the tailor, right?' she asked at last, after which I gave her directions as curtly as possible as her warm gaze brushed against my features that I could feel petrify with fear. 'You're the little girl of the pharmacist, right? Or are you his wife?[31] (Translation by Éva Misits)

When Mátyás Láng, an old friend of the family and the first suitor of Orsolya unexpectedly arrives at their house in Sopron, the following conversation occurs between him and Orsolya:

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31 Ott laktak, ugye, maguk a Landfeld szabóéval szomszédos házban? – kérdezte végezetül, minekutána a lehető legkevesebb szóval útba igazítottam, s meleg tekintetével végigsimogatta arcom vonásait, melyeket kővé válni éreztem a rémülettől. – A patikáriusnak a leánykája, igaz? Vagy a felesége? (Rakovszky, *A kígyó árnyéka* [The Shadow of the Snake] (Budapest: Magvető, 2002), 374.

> And then I've heard,' he continued reproachfully, 'that you, Orsicska, had been seized by something on the way here and didn't even make it into Ödenburg. I can't even begin to say how much the news depressed me,' he said in a voice trembling with emotion, reaching out boldly for my hand. I twitched but let his hand brush over mine for a little while. 'If I had known that you were alive I would have contacted you sooner… I don't even know how such a mistake is even possible… The person I heard the niews from was perhaps confused by how you and your step-mother were both called Orsolya. And I, of course, I thought you were the one who died…'
>
> 'No, it wasn't me, Mátyás!' I said, my eyes boring archly into his. 'The other Orsolya is the one who died, not me… As you can see, I'm alive and well!' and I let out a savage, almost cruel laugh. Unhappy man, he balked at such laughter and I could tell that just for one moment, he was seized by fear. And so I cast my eyes down and allowed him to convince himself that he was only imagining things.[32] (Translation by Éva Misits)

In the excerpt above, the 'other Orsolya' could be understood as Orsolya's other self, the buried self that was called Ursula Lehmann – in other words, the self that she could have been. The game of *Who is dead then?* also foreshadows the death of Mátyás Láng, who had to be killed that very night by the father for finding out the truth about them.

The novel ends when a fire allows Orsolya to successfully escape from the clutches of her father, and we learn from a few short comments and confessional statements that later on she made her husband miserable just as her father had made her life miserable. The novel thus narrates the life of a woman who was not identical to herself and was forced to live the life of another person. In other words, this identity narrative is about someone who does not find her place in life and

32 Azután meg azt hallottam, folytatta szemrehányóan, hogy magát, Orsicska, még idefele úton érte valami, s ide, Ödenburgba már meg sem érkezett. El sem mondhatom, mennyire lesújtott ez a hír, mondotta meghatottságtól rezgő hangon, és nagy merészen a kezem után nyúlt. Összerezzentem, de engedtem, hogy kis időre az enyémre simítsa a kezét. – Ha tudtam volna, hogy maga életben van, már régebben fölkerestem volna magukat… Nem is tudom, hogyan lehetséges ilyen tévedés… Azt a személyt, akitől a hírt hallottam, talán az zavarhatta össze, hogy maguk ketten, maga és a mostohája mindketten Orsolyák voltak. Én meg, ugye, azt hittem, maga volt az, aki meghalt…
Nem, nem én voltam, Mátyás! – villogtattam rá a szememet eszelős dévajsággal. – A másik Orsolya, az halt meg, nem én… Én, amint látja, élek! – és vadul, szinte gonoszul fölnevettem. A boldogtalan visszahőkölt e nevetés hallatán, s láttam rajta, hogy egy szempillantásnyi időre elfogja a félelem. Lesütöttem hát a szememet, s engedtem, hogy meggyőzze magát róla: csak képzelődött az imént.
Rakovszky, *A kígyó árnyéka* [The Shadow of the Snake], 386.

whose reaching a decision does not even have a place in the text as her free life and marriage are only mentioned by the narrator for the length of a few short pages.

The protagonist realizes several times during the course of her life and the narration of her life story that her fate is shaped not by herself but by intangible, impersonal processes, and these self-conscious and self-questioning texts evolve into a unique metanarrative that enters into dialogue not only with the narrative self but also with the expectations forming around the reader's own conceptions of what constitutes an identity narrative. The 'grand' narrative of the story's progression is thus accompanied by several background narratives.

In the first part of the book, there are only a few short comments hinting at the heroine's attempts to shape and improve her life, and how she comes to observe processes independent of her own situation from the perspective of how they might be able to bring about a change in her position. For instance, she attempts to seduce a young man from a wealthy family in the hopes that she may rise in rank through him, taking a risk that we can consider a more or less conscious attempt to break free. Later on, it is her pregnancy that propels her and the other characters forward among the trials and tribulations of history, and it is only in the relative calm and the gradual passing of outside events that Orsolya can once again question herself. Interestingly, after a long silence, these parts start multiplying towards the end of the book and can thus be interpreted as the story of the heroine's self-discovery and growing self-consciousness. The early self-reflections embedding a metanarrative of self-searching into the events only become meaningful in retrospect, from the standpoint of later parts. For most of the book, such references can only be found in traces and then suddenly become numerous in the last part where the background narrative of self-consciousness traces the tropes of suppression, silence and breaking out onto the 'grand' narrative of the linear progression of the novel. In the last part, voices of self-realization cry out one after another as repetitions and rearticulations of those first unconscious thoughts, thereby bringing the act of breaking out onto the surface.

> Once the usual way of life returned after the siege, I was forced to realize that I seemed to have been caught once and for all in a mouse trap that I don't even know how I ended up in, because I could not even say upon my soul that I had been forced into it, and even less so that I had entered it of my own free will.[33]

33 Midőn az ostrom után visszaállt az élet szokott rendje, rá kellett eszmélnem, hogy úgy tűnik, egyszer és mindenkorra fogva vagyok azon egérfogóban, amelybe magam sem tudom, hogyan kerültem, mert sem azt nem mondhattam igaz lélekkel, hogy belekényszerítettek volna, azt azonban még kevésbé, hogy szabad akaratomból léptem volna belé. Rakovszky, *A kígyó árnyéka* [The Shadow of the Snake], 371.

I had hoped that, were I to wear my own name again, if I could once again in the eyes of the world be whom I had felt, imprisoned within the walls of our house hidden away from the sight of others, it would be as though I had resurrected from this half-living, half-dead state, as though I had risen whole and intact from beneath the grave in Lázárfalva that was once pierced with a tombcross that bore my name.[34]

This sense of the unreal and alien state of myself that softly or acutely but constantly tortured me seemed to slowly spread onto every object and person I came into contact with as if it were some disease, a special form of plague that would gradually infect the entire world.[35]

Sometimes it appeared to me as though the external person I was in the eyes of the world and the one that I was to myself had split inside me and now the two were measuring each other with suspicious glances from a certain distance, and in the wake of this split I had fallen out of the fabric of human lives unfolding around me and had become separate, without precedent or a future trajectory, weightless like gossamer floating in the wind or like a ghost whose misty form real people could pass through as though there were nothing there but empty air.[36] (pp. 388–389 in the original Hungarian text) (Translation by Éva Misits)

From the beginning of the novel, the character strives to create her own identity but can only articulate what she could not achieve until this 'not-me-state' becomes fixed and Orsolya can do no more than express again and again how her life is a dead end. These repetitions become ruptures and interruptions in the primary

34 Azt reméltem, ha ismét tulajdon nevemet viselhetném, ha az lehetnék megint a világ szemében, akinek az emberek tekintete elől elfödözve, házunk falai közé zárva érezem magam, ez olyan volna, mintha föltámadnék e félig élő, félig holt állapotból, mintha teljes épségben kelnék ki a lázárfalvi sírdomb hantja alól, amely fölébe egykor a nevemet viselő fejfát tűzték. Rakovszky, *A kígyó árnyéka* [The Shadow of the Snake], 378.

35 Tulajdon magam ezen valótlan, világtól idegen mivoltának érzése, amely hol enyhébben, hol erősebben, de állandóan gyötört, úgy tűnt, lassanként átterjed minden tárgyra és személyre, amellyel érintkezésbe kerülök, s mintha csak valami ragály, a pestis különös formája lenne, fokonként megfertőzi az egész világot. Rakovszky, *A kígyó árnyéka* [The Shadow of the Snake], 384.

36 Néha úgy tűnt föl előttem, mintha kétfele vált volna bennem ama külső személy, aki a világ szemében, s ama másik, aki önnönmagam számára vagyok, s most bizonyos távolságból, gyanakvó szemmel méregetné egyik a másikát, s mintha e kettéhasadás következtében a körülöttem zajló emberi életek szövedékéből kihullottam s magamban állóvá, előzmény és folytatás nélkülivé, súlytalanná váltam volna, mint a szélben úszó ökörnyál vagy mint a kísértet, melynek ködből való testén a valóságos emberek oly könnyedén haladnak által, mintha nem volna más ott, csak üres levegő. Rakovszky, *A kígyó árnyéka* [The Shadow of the Snake], 388–389.

discourse of the novel, in the linearly progressing narrative – in short, these are the places where the loud communications of the texts are interrupted by silence.

In reference to the problem of the narrative voice and taking Shakespeare's Sonnet 23 as his starting point ('To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit'), Richard Aczel considers the gaze during reading as a kind of hearing, the overhearing of voices. He does not accept Derrida's widespread views on the voice and does not consider the voice as a metaphor of presence and origin or the manifestation of metaphysical thinking. He refers to Bakhtin in his argument that no single statement can be tied to the presence of the narrator since every voice itself is a polyphonic quotation-like act of speech full of differences and delays that cannot be traced to a single original source. Instead of using Derrida's concept of *différance*, Aczel returns to Heidegger's conceptions of language, in particular the concept of *Unter-schied* from his *Die Sprache*, noting at the same time that this work chronologically precedes and is precursory to Derrida's own theories. He also presumes that Heidegger's thoughts served as Derrida's starting point despite the fact that the French author makes no reference to Heidegger. According to Aczel, the free play of signifiers as unique to writing marks a return to Cartesian dualism since it treats language as an intangible object that constantly eludes the conscious control of the thinking subject. Writing can only be undefined and indecipherable once it has been read and this reading is inherently reading it as something based on a particular tuning (*Gestimmtkeit*) and disposition (*Befindichkeit*). Aczel argues that tuning and disposition serve to give direction to reading, which means that the free movement of signifiers can be brought into play precisely because the hearing of 'presence' (*Dasein*) is inherently tuned and situated. Referring to Heidegger's *Being and Time* and *On the Way To Language*, he concludes that dialogue is always preceded by hearing, but the tuning of that hearing is determined by dialogue, and this dialogical motif constrains the free play of *différance*, creating hearable voices for the tuned and situated ear. In short, this hearing is in essence a dialogical overhearing (Aczel 2001: 600–603).

Should we follow Aczel's line of thought, we may ask how the reader should *tune in* on and hear unspoken or unspeakable voices and how the reader may voice them. Since alternative feminine identities cannot be articulated within a progress-oriented narrative process except along its cracks, it has to break through the established discourse in order to point out the lack within. Therefore, a reader focusing on feminine points of view has to tune into the ruptures of the general narrative style of the novel, the pauses caught between the voices of narration, the lacks, the tangible omissions and the loud silences of the text.

One time in the forests surrounding Ödenburg, Orsolya finds herself face to face with a venomous snake. After her initial fright, she realizes that she could end her suffering right there and steps in front of the snake.

> As I approached, the snakeling suddenly reared its head as its larger and more dangerous brethren wont to do and straightened, sitting on the end of its rolled up tail to measure me with yellow-rimmed, sparkling cold eyes. The last rays of the slowly descending sun stretched its shadow so far on the golden glowing grass that the slightly widening silhouette of its head draped across my naked foot. I stood frozen, waiting for that shadow to give way to the cold, lively body of the animal and the bite of its fangs on my naked skin, but after we had stared at each other for a while, the small black maggot turned its eyes nonchalantly away from me as though he had decided he had no use of me and slithered away in the grass.[37] (Translation by Éva Misits)

Besides the excerpt above, the shadow of the snake also falls upon another stretch of text, thus drawing a parallel with the final scene of the book where in the certain shadow of death and the threat of a witch trial, moonlight falls upon Orsolya's hand the same way the snake's shadow once draped across her foot.

> I also know that sooner or later, somebody will report my strange behavior to the council and then my old age won't protect me from interrogation, from prison or even the stake… I know this very well inside, in the darkness of my room, and I also know that come morning, I will forget or at least attempt to forget this knowledge because I will be irresistibly drawn outside towards the trees, driven by a yearning for my modest pursuits and a few strawberries that I hope to find on a small round meadow surrounded by raspberry bushes where I discovered their leaves once in early spring.
>
> I lie down on my back in bed beneath my thin covers and wait for sleep to come. Greenish streaks of moonlight cut the bed in two and I see two hands intertwined and resting upon the sheets, two old hands that I cannot recognize as my own. Then the moon rises further

37 Közeledésemre a kígyócska hirtelen fölágaskodott, ahogyan nagyobb testű és veszedelmesebb testvérei tenni szokták, s így fölegyenesedve, karikába hajlított farka végén ülve méregetett sárga körrel övezett, hidegen csillámló szemével. A lassan alászálló nap végső sugarai oly hosszan elnyújtóztatták árnyékát az aranyos fénnyel izzó gyepen, hogy fejének kissé kiszélesedő árnyképe ráhullott csupasz lábfejemre. Dermedten álltam, várva, hogy árnyéka után az eleven állat testének hidegét s fogának marását is ott érezzem csupasz bőrömön, a kis fekete féreg azonban, minekutána egy darabig farkasszemet néztünk egymással, közönyösen elfordította rólam a tekintetét, mintha eldöntötte volna, hogy semmi hasznomat nem veheti, s eliramlott a fű közt. Rakovszky, A kígyó árnyéka [The Shadow of the Snake], 401.

in the sky, the streak of light is snuffed out and I don't see anything anymore.[38] (Translation by Éva Misits)

The streak of moonlight in the excerpt above evokes the moment when the snake gazed up at Orsolya, and just like the snake, the moonlight passes nonchalantly, leaving a little more time to live and to the struggle for life. However, the darkness left in the wake of the moon also foreshadows eternal darkness, the ending of the book and the darkness that remains on our hands after the colorful events of the novel, thus foreshadowing the desolation of the reader. These closing lines may also be a reference to earlier parts of the text – the accusations of witchcraft have been inspired by the old woman's attraction to the forest, which may leave the reader to suppose in retrospect that Orsolya might have bewitched the snake, that it was her witchcraft that protected her from death.

If the reader considers the motif of hands discussed above carefully, they might draw parallels with Margit Kaffka's novel *Colors and Years*. The image of intertwined hands emerges in parts that articulate the self-reflections of the woman narrating her story, an image connected to issues of creation.

They have to do something to pass the time; they have to convince themselves that for a time, at least, something or other is important, otherwise they would end up sitting idly by the roadside, hands clasped – which might be the natural thing to do, of course; everything else is mere self-deception and self-importance. (Kaffka 2008: 17)[39]

Who would have thought? I can sit for hours in one place with my hands clasped into my lap. My small apartment has a separate garden gate looking out on a narrow street, I use to go to church; I don't even have to see the other inhabitants, well-to-do elderly

38 Tudom azt is, hogy előbb-utóbb valaki jelenteni fogja különös magaviseletemet a tanácsnak, s hogy akkor vén korom nem fog megóvni a vallatástól, a tömlöctől, s talán a máglyától sem… Itt magamban, szobám sötétségében jól tudom mindezeket, de tudom azt is, hogy reggelre kelve elfeledem, vagy legalábbis megpróbálok elfeledkezni e tudásról, mert ellenállhatatlanul húz majd kifelé, a fák közé a vágyakozás szerény keresményem s ama néhány szem szamóca után, amelyet egy málnabokrokkal szegett kis kerek tisztáson, ahol leveleit egyszer, még kora tavasszal észrevettem, találni remélek. Hanyatt fekszem az ágyon vékony takaróm alatt, s várom az álmot. A holdfény zöldes csíkja kettőbe vágja az ágyat, s én két egymásba kulcsolt kezet látok a takarón nyugodni, két öreg kezet, amelyekben sehogyan sem bírok a magam kezére ráismerni. Azután a hold följebb halad az égen, a fénycsík kialszik, s nem látok többé semmit sem. Rakovszky, *A kígyó árnyéka* [The Shadow of the Snake], 467.

39 Valamivel ki kell tölteni az időt, el kell hitetni magunkkal egy s más dolgokról egy időre, hogy az fontos. Mert különben egybekulcsolt kezekkel ülnénk az útszélen, és talán ez volna a természetes – minden egyéb csak magahitető fontoskodás. Margit Kaffka, *Színek és évek* [Colours and Years] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1973), 5.

> Germans, if I don't want to. Yet they're close enough if I should need help, and they're kindly folks besides. I sometimes sit like this on the porch; the gentle tolling of the church bell reaches me through the blue and white of the late-afternoon summer sky, and the warm fragrance of my little old lady's flowers drift fragrantly towards me in this handkerchief-sized place. (Kaffka 2008: 19)[40]

> I have heard it said that when you are travelling along a mountainous country-side, sometimes you have to take just a step or two for the scenery to change completely in front of your eyes – the relationship of the hills and valleys to each other. The panorama is entirely different from every place you stop to rest. Perhaps it is the same with events, too, and possibly what I regard today as the story of my life is merely a picture of my life, shaped by my present way of thinking. Of course, that makes it all the more *mine*; indeed, on such church-bell ringing afternoons as this, as warm and as solitary, I can think of no preoccupation more interesting, colorful and precious than this. (Kaffka 2008: 21, emphasis – M.K.).[41]

The last sentence of the excerpt above can be understood as an addition or complement in the sense of the Derridean 'supplement' (1977: 141–5) that undermines all that has been previously said. The penultimate sentence is articulated as an absolute statement that rules out all uncertainties, but is then followed by a supplement, an incomplete sentence without a predicate attached to the previous sentence since it makes no sense without it. The supplement thus undermines the 'main sentence', its postponed adverbial clause of time delimiting what has been previously said. These sentences also play on the topic of the paragraph – just like another climb at the top of the mountain or the distance of another few steps, the postponed supplement casts a new light on what we had seen before. At the same time, the lonely afternoon filled with bell tolls gives precious little new information, only

40 Tudok sokáig ülni egy helyt, ölembe kulcsolt kézzel; ki hitte volna ezt? Ennek a kis lakásomnak külön kerti ajtaja van egy szűk utácskára; azon át szoktam templomba járni, a háziakat – módos, öreg svábok – látnom sem kell, ha nem akarom. Segítségre pedig közel vannak és jámbor népek. Így ülök néha a tornácban; délutáni csendes harangszó bong felém a nyári kék-fehér levegőégen át, és meleg szagú, kis vénasszony-virágaim illatoznak felém a tenyérnyi helyen. Margit Kaffka, *Színek és évek* [Colours and Years] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1973), 7.

41 Hallottam egyszer, hogy ha az ember hegyes vidéken jár – néha csak egypár lépést megy odább, és egészen megváltozik szeme előtt a tájkép; völgyek és ormok elhelyezkedése egymáshoz. Minden pihenőhelyről nézve egészen más a panoráma. Így van ez az eseményekkel is talán; és meglehet, hogy amit ma az élettörténetemnek gondolok, az csak mostani gondolkodásom szerint formált kép az életemről. De akkor annál inkább az enyém – és érdekesebb, tarkább, becsesebb játékszert ennél el sem gondolhatok magamnak. Ilyen harangszós, meleg, magános délutánokon. (Kiemelés – K. M.) Margit Kaffka, *Színek és évek* [Colours and Years] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1973), 9.

modifying what came before and thus focusing attention not on what has been said *per se* but rather on the very act of narration. The alliteration in the original Hungarian text and the meaning of 'bell tolls' also direct our attention to sound, allowing the reader to ponder where these words might have been uttered before and reminding us that the bells had also tolled in the background of an earlier passage. This trinity of hinting at the act of narration, the bell toll motif and the intertwining of hands also appears in the final lines of *Colors and Years*, reminiscent of the above quoted ending of *The Shadow of the Snake*.

> I am surrounded by a deep and pleasurable tranquility; I can hear the bells clearly, and with my hands in my lap I can sit in the same place, alone and for hours on end, reviving memories in a thousand different ways, making various connections and coming up with various explanations, thinking about the affairs of a distant, very distant life. (242)[42]

In the excerpt from *Colors and Years* quoted above and the ending of *The Shadow of the Snake*, contemplation is accompanied by sound (bell tolls) and a strong light (moonlight), respectively. To be more precise, these influence the narrator's thoughts – the concluding life and the closure of the novel are reinterpreted in the shadow of death. However, the last sentence is by no means a complete closure since it is full of hitches that render reading difficult. The insertion unhinges the calm forward progression of reading, and expecting an object suffix after the adverbial verbs in the original Hungarian text or the alignment of the object in the English version, the reader must return to the predicate of the main sentence, contemplating, to restore the grammatical order of the ending. This sentence laden with enumerations, supplements and postponed adverbs imbues the final thought meant to close the framework with a sense of anxiety. The supplement is once again a 'dangerous supplement', questioning the idea of a whole, unified, concluded life story and the idea of the concluded novel.

In Noémi Szécsi's novel *Finno-Ugric Vampire* [Finnugor vámpír] (2002), the narrator is a vampire vegetating in turn-of-the-millennium Hungary as a young student of Arts and Humanities. We could easily attribute the text to a female narrator since the title suggests a woman writer and the first person singular narrative voice may invoke the tradition of confessional feminine prose in the reader. However, on closer inspection of the novel, we realize that we cannot be certain of the gender of the narrator – even gender categories themselves become

42 Szép, nagy csendesség van, tisztán hallik a harangszó, és én ölembe ejtett kézzel tudok egy helyben ülni, soká, egyedül, és eltűnődni – százféleképpen fűzve, magyarázva, felújítva – a messzi, messzi élet dolgain. Margit Kaffka, *Színek és évek* [Colours and Years] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1973), 237.

unstable in the course of reading. In the first part, the vampire is attracted to a man, and then in the second part to a woman, opening the possibility that the vampire may have chosen the other gender after their resurrection or that they are attracted to people of the same gender in one of the parts. The difficulties of determining gender identity thus question the stability of gender categories, and in several parts of the novel, the narrator reflects with wry criticism on the cultural reflexes of forcing women into categories.

> Men's spirit and women's bodies, that's all world history is about. I can even give you a sketchy summary of the main types: blonde women are gentle, good and kind; brunettes and black-haired women are sanguine, wilful and rarely harbor good intentions. According to another version, black ones are mysterious, red-heads are temperamental, brunettes are smart and blondes are not – they are cold instead. This, too, I read from a book, but I believe it since it shows such great insight into human nature.[43] (Translation by Éva Misits)

Due to the uncertainty of gender, discourses supporting women cannot be unequivocally tied to a female narrator; therefore, we can conclude that in *Finno-Ugric Vampire,* the representation of issues of feminine identity is not connected to a self-identified feminine subjectivity. Subordinated femininity does not even speak in its own voice, all that is 'spoken' is a non-articulation due to millennia-old cultural prejudices and even this articulation is transposed since the narrator refers to books and texts that reproduce feminine stereotypes.

In the works I examined above, the simultaneous representation of centered and decentered conceptions of the subject is made possible by confronting the reader with issues of feminine identity without actively encouraging a definite answer or absolute closure. In this regard, the works of Virág Erdős and Zsuzsa Rakovszky play a double game with us: the title *Portrait* and the name changes in *The Shadow of the Snake* can easily induce the question 'Who is the feminine self?' They offer no clear answers, leading the reader to formulate questions implying a centered subjectivity while at the same time suggesting a constantly transforming and shifting decentered subjectivity. The struggle to find the self and the pressure to search for it become a constitutive experience for the reader that may even dislodge the reading self from its fixed position. In other words, instead of satisfying

43 Férfiszellem és női test, erről szól a világ története. A fő fajtákat is összefoglalhatom vázlatosan: a szőke nők szelídek, jók és kedvesek; a barnák, feketék vérmesek, akaratosak, és ritkán lakozik bennük jó szándék. Más változat szerint: a feketék titokzatosak, a vörösek temperamentumosak, a barnák okosak, a szőkék nem, viszont hűvösek. Ezt is könyvből olvastam, de elhiszem, mert nagy emberismeretet mutat. Noémi Szécsi, *Finnugor vámpír* [Finno-Ugric Vampire] (Budapest: Kijárat, 2002), 37.

readers' desires for progression towards a static resolution, these works encourage a receptive behavior that questions even its own self-identification.

Feminine Writing: The Rhetoric of Enumeration

Language use in the works of Alaine Polcz presents us with the exaggerated forms of feminine stereotypes, deep-rooted rhetorical phrases, speech styles and forms of thinking traditionally considered feminine, and in Viktória Köves' novel *Ready or Not* [Aki bújt, aki nem], all self-definitions of the female narrator are tied to men to a point where the passionate desire to be accepted seems a little too perfect. The fast-thinking, passionate speech style does not necessarily immerse the reader; on the contrary, it appears to exaggerate over and over, casting doubt on previous statements.

In *Girls' Novel* [Leányregény] by Alaine Polcz (2000), the female narrator-character tells the story of her seaside vacation in Romania, and upon reading it, it is difficult to decide just where to place this piece. It sits on the periphery of literature in the sense that it does not behave like a text intended for publication – at first glance, it seems like a travel journal written for private use, to commemorate the events of that summer. It also contains sentences that seem out of place in literary prose: 'My luggage is still in Constanta but the small satchel I brought with me is sufficient, no problem. And so we said goodbye to each other. I don't remember how I had spent these one and a half days. I simply have no memory of it.'[44] (Translation by Éva Misits)

Instead of a light summer read, *Girls' Novel* presents the life of a seaside hotel from the period of the Ceausescu regime where the lives of the hotel employees are fraught with malicious rumors, intelligence reports and untreated diseases. The narrative situation created by the travel journal also allows the female narrator not to disclose too much information of herself, remaining unknown to the reader as she befriends two employees at the hotel, Izabella and Terike, who despise each other over a handsome man. The story that unfolds is quite unlike the genre of the tear-jerker novel for girls ending in happy marriages – even the title itself is not 'Novel for Girls' but 'Girls' Novel' (compare 'lányregény' vs. 'leányregény'). One could say that the difference is a mere slip of the tongue, a mistake compared to the original, just as the novel presents us with a series of actual

44 A csomagom még benn van Constanţában, de a kicsi szatyor, amit magammal hoztam, elégséges, nem probléma. Ezzel el is búcsúzunk egymástól. Nem emlékszem, hogy ezt a másfél napot hogyan töltöttem. Egész egyszerűen nincs emlékem.' Polcz, Alaine, *Leányregény* [Girls' Novel] (Pécs: Jelenkor, 2000), 19–20.

mistakes where we never find out what is true and what is not as rumors come and go and a passionate 'underground' forms 'behind' the neatly set dining room, leaving hotel guests to mere speculation. Accordingly, the narrator cannot reconcile the contradictory stories of Izabella and Terike, who are both unmarried girls waiting for the One with a long history of disappointments. For instance, we find out that both of them regularly suffer from ovaritis: Izabella explains that her illness is the result of an amateur abortion while Terike notes that she cannot go into the water due to her ovaritis, and although we do not find out what had caused Terike's illness in the first place, we may assume that the fates of the two women might be similar.

As we shall see, the narrating female character can comfortably assume the position of the outsider:

> She suddenly asks, 'Say, don't you think there's something about me that's too much? Like, make-up or something, don't you think it's a little provocative?' 'Just a bit, Teri. Yeah, you have too much spunk and stuff. But I like it.' 'You mean I'm a bit slutty?' 'A bit.' […]
>
> Then and there at the piscine, I say to her, 'You know, Teri, if you have too much jewelry and too much make-up on, it distracts people's attention and you just hide your eyes, your mimicry and your essence with all this decoration. Don't cover up yourself like that! Try to be more like yourself.' Her gaze searches me and her eyes spark with realization. I wonder what self Teri would show if she removed all this glitter. Isn't this her real self? She quickly replies, 'You know, when I've just taken a bath and I'm dressed up nicely, I curl my hair, step into the bus, take the microphone and smile at people, or I'm just walking down the street and people turn after me, that's what I like! I like being well rested and smooth.' She suddenly looks at me and says, 'I have a lotion that can hide wrinkles, I'll give you some later, okay? And if you like, I can get more of it.' 'Okay,' I say.[45] (Translation by Éva Misits)

45 Váratlanul kérdi: 'Mondd, nincs bennem valami, ami túl sok? A festék vagy valami, nem lehet, hogy egy kicsit kihívó?' 'Egy csöppet, Teri. Igen, túl sok a modorod, meg minden. De nekem tetszik.' 'Úgy érted, hogy kicsit kurvás vagyok?' 'Egy kicsit.' […]
Még ott, a piszcina mellett mondom: 'Tudod, Teri, ha túl sok ékszer van rajtad és túl sok festék, akkor az köti le az ember figyelmét, és a szemedet, a mimikádat, a lényedet takarod el a sok díszítéssel. Ne takard el magad! Próbálj jobban magad lenni.' Fürkészve néz rám, megértés villan a szemében. Azon tűnődöm, vajon milyen ént mutathat Teri, ha mindezt a csillogást leveszi? Vajon nem ez az igaz énje? Erre vág rá: 'Tudod, frissen fürödve, mikor szépen föl vagyok öltözve, besütöm a hajamat, odaállok a buszba, odaveszem a mikrofont és rámosolygok az emberekre, vagy megyek az utcán és megfordulnak utánam, ezt szeretem! Szeretek kipihent, kialudt, sima lenni.' Hirtelen rám néz: 'Van egy krémem, amivel el lehet tüntetni a ráncokat, majd adok belőle, jó?

The quotations of characters' conversations are continuously embedded in the narrative, leaving no independent space or even a separate paragraph for Terike's own talk on the page. Her quoted utterances are smoothed into the dominant summer vacation narrative and her characteristic otherness, her 'exaggerations' have been erased from her speech. The issue of exaggeration and what is 'normal' also highlights cultural differences. When the narrator thinks that Terike's jewelry is too much and her clothes are provocative, she maintains the 'normal' position for herself, leaving her situation unmarked – it is in contrast to her that something becomes an exaggeration. However, the possessor of the 'normal' category, the anonymous, neutral narrator devoid of passion or emotional outbursts is later proven to be prone to exaggerations as well. As Terike puts on more and more chains, buckles, make-up and lotion and the narrator enumerates these accessories, the reader can tell that Terike's femininity emerges within the tropes of addition. Nevertheless, as the reader later discovers, the narrator cannot assume a fixed position after all: the self-assured anonymous feminine self is discovered to be a slave to accessories herself.

The narrator's vacation ends with shopping, the point where the event-related narrative text switches to enumeration and the shopping list of the narrator is reminiscent of the enumeration of Terike's accessories. The balanced, cultured, modest behavior seems to escape from its fixed 'normal' position – we might even detect a sense of irony in the foregrounding of shopping as a traditional feminine activity and the *faux-naive*, detail-oriented 'typical' feminine talk of the narrator.

> I absolutely want a candelabra. I'm going to buy a few plates and small saucers to use as ashtrays. I don't know why, but I'm bargaining. I'm astonished since I do have money. I think I had gotten so used to having to bargain in Romania that it's in my blood now. And they don't get angry, they are happy to yield. I say, 'I'm buying twelve saucers, it's cheaper then, right?' 'Yes,' they say readily, and happily wrap it in newspaper. I wanted to bring all my coworkers an ashtray but for one, it would have cost too much, and two, it would have been too much to carry, and besides, I also have to bring a few things for others. What do I get for my coworkers? I'm thinking. This is my third trip abroad and that's twelve people. There's no use thinking about it.[46] (Translation by Éva Misits)

És ha megfelel, akkor még szerzek.' 'Jó.' – mondom.' Polcz, Alaine, *Leányregény* [Girls' Novel], 72–74.

46 Mindenképpen vágyom egy többágú gyertyatartóra. Veszek egy pár tányért, és kistányért hamutartónak. Nem tudom, miért, alkuszom. Meg vagyok döbbenve, hiszen van pénzem. Azt hiszem, annyira megszoktam, hogy Romániában alkudni kell, már a véremben van. Ők sem haragusznak meg, szívesen engednek. Mondom: 'Veszek

The text teeters on the edge of seriousness and ridiculousness as a precise portrait, even an over-exaggeration of scrupulous, detail-oriented 'feminine' thinking. Candelabra, plates, saucers and ashtrays pop up in rapid succession in this shopping spree, followed at the next two pages by a red belt, a salt shaker, match holders and a necklace made from shells (pp. 97–98 of the original Hungarian text). The list of gifts only ends on the last few pages: 'Considering that I've bought Korondi pottery and I'm bringing Egon cognac and Miklós cherry, coat hangers, a basket, a mortar and pestle, dogberries and eggplant paste, cottage cheese and olives in a jar, I have enough luggage.'[47] The sentence is also loaded with objects in the grammatical sense – one can hardly find its predicate. This accumulation of objects is one of the rhetorical tropes of exaggeration: the narration of women's shopping has 'outdone itself' and thus shifted from its fixed, conventional position, thereby making the invisible visible and exposing the widely accepted cliché image tied to 'feminine' thinking and discourse.

Just like *Girls' Novel*, Alaine Polcz's short narrative *Ripples in Life and the Sea* [Fodrozódik az élet és a tenger] can also be interpreted along the tropes of exaggeration as we read detailed descriptions of female bodies. Traditional notions about women – the idea of passivity and women being present only as bodies in (men's) discourses – are amplified to such an extent that they question themselves in a short story that is about women sunbathing and nothing more. Nothing happens in the story: we see a strong emphasis on feminine passivity in the way the narrator recounts the motionless female bodies lying around. We see one of the all-pervasive tropes of Western culture, the masculine gaze and the female body as the object of desire (de Lauretis 1984: 8)[48], multiplied, magnified

tizenkét kistányért, akkor ennyivel olcsóbb? 'Igen' – mondják készségesen. Örömmel csomagolják újságpapírba. Minden munkatársamnak akartam hozni egy hamutartót, de egyrészt túl sokba került volna, másrészt túl sok cipelni, azonkívül másoknak is kell egyet-mást hazavinnem. Mit is vigyek a munkatársaimnak? Gondolkodom. Ez a harmadik külföldi utam, és tizenkét ember. Ezen kár gondolkodni. (95–96).

47 Tekintettel arra, hogy korondit vásároltam, meg hozok Egonnak konyakot, Miklósnak cherryt, vállfát, kosarat és mozsarat, somot és vinetát, túrót, olajbogyót üvegestül, épp elég csomagom van.' (141).

48 Teresa de Lauretis compares the results of feminist theories, film theories, narratology and psychoanalysis, finding interesting correlations. She considers the representation of women on the silver screen to be a characteristic perspective of the whole of Western culture where women fill the role of spectacle and the body that are both objects of the spectator's gaze and desire. This gaze is typically masculine, a viewpoint that represents and appropriates Western culture. Teresa, de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 6–8.

and inverted since in this particular case, these women are observed by a female spectator instead. Not only may the spectacle seem exhausting, but the substitution of a female gaze instead of a male one, shifting what the usual situation might be can lead to the transposition of what is natural and taken for granted; in other words, the reader's attention may shift from the spectacle of female bodies towards the perspective of the spectator. From this standpoint, the 'natural' masculine perspective can be rendered visible and thereby a subject of criticism. From this spatial viewpoint unusual in narratives, we catch glimpses of the female body that can shatter (masculine) fantasies and illusions of the female body.

> If I look, I inevitably see. And so one time I wake up, open my eyes half asleep, and five feet from me I see a woman with a sunflower butt. Imagine her being beautiful and black like an African, and as she bends down, white streaks emerge. We can see snow white dividing lines in reddish brown and in the middle there's a dark bush. The sunflower is irresistibly funny, I quickly wake up Márta to tell her to look. Of course a woman can have no idea what the depths of her own butt look like. Because when I look in a mirror, I can only do that standing and so the depths and the anus are completely hidden. Who has ever seen their own butthole?
>
> And now I know that hair can come all the way to the back from the front, sneaking way up to the butt crack – though not in everyone's case, of course. More observation is necessary – but the weather has gone off, so it won't be possible anymore.[49]

In Alaine Polcz's short story, feminine talk that goes well beyond the stereotypical masculine viewpoint may not leave the prevalent discourses but does step out through exaggeration, creating a special feminine discursive space. The rhetoric of overemphasis thus establishes a situation in the text where feminine characteristics and a feminine perspective become articulated. This feminine perspective transcends the masculine perspective and discusses women's body parts in

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49 Ha nézek, óhatatlanul látok. Így egyszer fölébredek, félálomban kinyitom a szemem: másfél méterre az orrom előtt egy napraforgó fenekű nőt látok. Úgy képzeljük el, hogy gyönyörű négerbarna, és ahogy lehajol, fehér sugárvonalak tűnnek elő. Hófehér választóvonalakat látunk, vörösesbarnában, középütt ott a sötét bozont. A napraforgó ellenállhatatlanul humoros, gyorsan ébresztem Mártát is, hogy nézze meg. Persze egy nőnek sejtelme sem lehet arról, hogy milyen a saját feneke mélye. Mert ha én nézem egy tükörben, azt csak állva tehetem, és így a mélye és az anusnyílás teljesen rejtett. Ki látta a saját fenéknyílását?
Most meg tudom azt is, hogy a szőrzet elölről teljesen hátra jöhet, fölkúszva a fenékvágásba – persze nem mindenkinél. Bővebb megfigyelésre van szükség – az idő elromlott, nem lesz már lehetséges. Alaine Polcz, *Fodrozódik az élet és a tenger* [Ripples in Life and the Sea.] In Körmendy, Zsuzsa (ed.): *Körkép* [Panorama] (Budapest: Magvető, 1996), 209.

such detail as to exceed traditional male discourses about women. This breach can be interpreted as a breach of the conventional rhetorical phrases and values of culture, but can also be seen as the inability to transcend them entirely, a confrontation with the precedence of language in women's situation.

The list-like, detailed and repetitive enumeration of female body parts and the dispassionate tone of the narrative can easily enter into an intertextual relation with the texts of Marquis de Sade, for instance with *The 120 Days of Sodom*, where the description, evaluation and categorization of the female buttocks is often articulated from a feminine viewpoint (de Sade 2000: 76–76). However, the displayed object of desire loses its enticing character compared to Sade, or rather retains it inasmuch as it is evocative of Sade, making this text a deheroized version of his text. In *Ripples in Life and the Sea*, we are in an open space and see the female body in blinding sunlight, in a completely different light from the closed chambers, closets and *boudoirs* of Sade, leading us to see his text in a different light as well. The dispassionate tone not only evokes Sade but also dispassionately repeats the text, ironically reproducing and placing the realm of the bizarre, the darkness and Evil into the sunlight and the bright side of culture.

The above quoted works of Alaine Polcz can be considered a special form of feminine writing in the sense that her language-creating and language-searching procedures create a space for the representation of women while avoiding the most frequent criticism of *écriture feminine*, the problems of essentialism. By shifting and transposing prevalent discourses, these procedures create gender differences without striving to articulate the essence of femininity or the evocation of maternal voices. They stay within the prevailing (masculine) discourse and acknowledge its operation while stretching it to extremes and widening its frame to create special spaces of feminine articulation without suggesting the possibility of the creation of a completely different feminine language.

Excluded Voices

In this section, I examine works that voice female characters driven to the periphery of society, deprived of any chance of self-assertiveness and self-realization. The writing of Virág Erdős speaks the language of women who had been victims of violence while Zsuzsa Forgács presents the world of 'fourth-class' women citizens migrating to New York and becoming trapped in American immigration. In each text, the minority perspective goes hand in hand with a poetics that foregrounds the playfulness of language.

Gabriella Nagy's conclusion is a fitting description of the works mentioned above: the body becomes central from an internal or childlike perspective, but

not as the mere object of presentation, which in Erdős' case shifts the focus to shame, secrecy, folly, pettiness, anxiety, misfortune, falling down, feeling lost and the deficiencies of the body, all of them directly or indirectly pertaining to the body or to a person as entity. She writes about women's things that are inappropriate, do not belong in literature and are not very becoming – observes Gabriella Nagy (2001: 202). We thus read about the physical and emotional vulnerability of women, domestic violence and incest. One of the most characteristic pieces to discuss here is *Hell No* [Na ne] from the volume *It's Good to Be* [Lenni jó].

> When my mother became way too old, that's when life turned grand. I even helped my father to take her out of the house. From then on, everything was the way I always wanted, and Tüszi Rabbit and I moved to the big bed where you could see the TV all day and all night. And when the mischief happened, dad got a pill, we squeezed it out together and flushed the baby neatly down the toilet. The next day dad complained about me still sitting there and I bet he wasn't happy at all when he saw what was up.[50] (Translation by Éva Misits)

The excerpt quoted above is one of eleven passages where a woman narrates stages of her life from childhood to adulthood, retaining the tone of an unknowledgeable child to the very end. This 'childlike' perspective does not change as the child's defenselessness against adults transforms into the defenselessness of women against men – just as the little girl accepts her parents as destined and given, the narrator comes to see the violence, the constant humiliation and sexual violence as the way things are. In the various life stages enumerated by the text, (physical or emotional) violence against women is a recurring motif: the chronological continuity of the narrative shows a direct correlation between domestic violence in childhood and violence suffered in adulthood as established by a tone that does not change, does not 'mature' along with the narrator. The penultimate passage reads as follows:

> We went on summer vacation every year with the children, but of course it didn't necessarily have to be summer, it was November last time too by the time we started, I remember that that was the first day of snow, and my husband never came with us, he just shouted at us from inside or threw stuff after us at best, and we just ran because it

50 Aranyélet akkortól lett, mikorra az anyám végleg kiöregedett. Még segítettem is apámnak kivinni a házból. Akkor aztán minden úgy lett, ahogy mindig akartam. Tüszi nyúllal beköltöztünk mi is a nagyágyra, onnan aztán éjjel-nappal lehetett látni a tévét. Mikor pedig meglett a baj, apa szerzett pirulát, közös erővel kinyomtuk, aztán szépen lehúztuk a vécén a babát. Másnap apa reklamált, hogy mit ülök ott még mindig, és biztos nagyon nem örült, mikor látta, hogy mi van. Virág Erdős, *Belső udvar* [Courtyards] (Budapest: Kijárat, 1998), 25.

was usually evening and we had to run very fast to see the tide, of course sometimes we just hid in the toilet, it was like a cheap little motel for us, we enjoyed the calm, the peace and quiet, but sadly in the end summer always flew away.[51] (Translation by Éva Misits)

The beginning and ending clauses of the excerpt quoted above are completely ordinary, but what can be read between the two is not reminiscent of a typical vacation in the least. As the situation unfolds, it moves reverse to the progression of the text: while the first sentence may suggest the idea of a family vacation, the image becomes increasingly more dreary and suspicious until it gradually transforms into the image of a woman fleeing from the house with her children. Perhaps the most shocking contradiction of *Hell No* is that it articulates a feminine helplessness that could not even reach the stage of articulating itself – the narrator seems unaware of how much she suffers, experiencing male violence against women as the order of the world, an impersonal misfortune. The tone of the text is reminiscent of the *Annals of St. Gall* ('709 Hard winter. Duke Gottfried died. 710 Hard year and deficient in crops; 711; 712 Flood everywhere.') in the much quoted article of Hayden White (1980: 11). According to White, the years in the first column constitute a non-narrative sequence that suggests the never-ending reign of the divine world order, allowing us to draw a parallel between this sequence and Virág Erdős' *Hell No* that merely enumerates consecutive acts of violence. In *Hell No*, temporal progression without causality also denotes an unchanging world order of male dominance and the vulnerability of women. Passage of time is signaled by the various stages of male-female relations such as little girl and father, romantic relationships, husband and wife, mother and son – relations that the various passages build upon to show us how the little girl slowly becomes an adult, a woman, a wife and a mother. The various parts consist in the enumeration of events rather than form a coherent story; just like the voice of the *Annals*, the narrator of *Hell No* simply notes down events in the order of their appearance on her personal horizon, presenting a world where things happen to people rather than a world where people shape their own fates (1980: 16–17). In his article, White posits a similar correlation between narrativity, law, legitimacy

51 A gyerekekkel minden évben elmentünk nyaralni, persze nem is ragaszkodtunk feltétlen a *nyárhoz*, legutóbb is november volt, mire végre nekivágtunk, emlékszem hogy aznap esett először a hó, a férjem sose jött velünk, csak odabentről ordibált, maximum ha kihajigált még utánunk ezt-azt, mi is inkább szaladtunk, mert általában este volt, és nagyon kellett futnunk, hogy még lássuk a dagályt, olyan is volt persze, hogy csak bebújtunk a budiba, annyi volt az nekünk, mint egy olcsó kis motel, élveztük a nyugalmat, a békét és a csendet, csak hát sajnos *végül* mindig elröpült a nyár. Virág Erdős, *Belső udvar* [Courtyards], 26.

and authority, arguing that in historical writing, central subjects, causality and linear structures only emerge when the narrator foregrounds law and social order or threats pertaining to either.

In light of the discussion above, the narrator of *Hell No* speaks from a space excluded from the culture of the narrative (of law and order), a space where the suffering of women cannot even be articulated in the language of the law. The very title *Hell No* could be interpreted as a closing speech act: by informing us of this unarticulated world, the text immediately embeds it in the context of assertiveness. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the original title *Na ne* recalls the abbreviation NANE, a Hungarian women's rights association called Nők a Nőkért Együtt az Erőszak Ellen [Women for Women Together against Violence]. The Hungarian title can thus place the feminine world trapped beyond law and order into a new perspective, showing a way towards the various dimensions of the law to put an end to interpretations of women's helplessness as a misfortune (the way the *Annals* interpreted history) and raise the issue of the personal and personal responsibility. From the perspective of NANE, the speech acts of naming and ending become even more obvious in *Na ne*: it is the naming and ending of unarticulated violence suffered by women.

Virág Erdős's writing is eerily reminiscent of Zsuzsa Forgács's work *Inventory of My Guy's Good Deeds* [Leltár pasim jó cselekedeteiről] from the volume *Found Woman* [Talált nő]:

> *September 19.*
>
> Today my guy was overcome with teary-eyed piety. He didn't criticize me at all for spending too much time with my friends, instead he talked to me about his tortured existence and then graciously allowed me to report on my own misery. He was in such a forgiving mood that he even permitted me to cheer him up by telling him in the eye how strong and terrible he was, in other words, terribly wonderful. For reasons that exceed my intellectual capacities to fathom, he toned down his usual reflections of how I am unfit for anything and how unbearably neurotic I am.[52] (Translation by Éva Misits)

52 *Szeptember 19.*
Pasimon ma könnyes kegyeletteljesség lett úrrá. Egyáltalán nem kritizált, amiért túl sok időt töltök a barátnőimmel, ehelyett sanyarú sorsáról mesélt nekem, és utána kegyesen hagyta, hogy beszámoljak a saját nyomoromról. Annyira megbocsátó hangulatban volt, hogy még azt is megengedte nekem, hogy felvidítsam azzal, hogy a szemébe mondom, milyen erős és félelmetes is ő, magyarán félelmetesen csodálatos. Értelmi képességeimet meghaladó okokból kifolyólag takarékra állította szokásos elmefuttatását arról, hogy mennyire nem vagyok jó semmire, továbbá, hogy milyen elviselhetetlenül neurotikus vagyok. Zsuzsa Forgács, *Talált nő* [Found Woman] (Budapest: Q:E:D, 1995), 96.

In Zsuzsa Forgács's work, we find journal entries that are exactly as the title says, an inventory of the guy's acts of violence against the woman. We cannot organize our reading into a narrative process – we only see a few excerpts from between September 10 and November 26 from an unknown year, a random list emerging from timelessness and pointing towards the timelessness of men's acts of terror seen as an inevitable misfortune (just like flood or war in chronicles). The woman is not the actor but the sufferer of these events where the feminine voice manifests as an anonymous annalist reminiscent of the 'pre-narrative' style of the *Annals*, a mere recorder of fatalistic events. Here it is the lack of protest or the lack of a conscious feminine subject that may spark resistance in the recipient – this very lack may be what alerts the reader to the necessity of articulating women's rights.

Found Woman consists of seemingly unorganized short stories written in a variety of genres where chapters are placed one after the other like clashing articles of clothing piled negligently into a heap; however, the loose organization of texts is in line with the heavy-set, slovenly and rather unfashionable figure that emerges in the text. In these stories, women are always cast in an excluded, misunderstood and oppressed role – for instance, several of the pieces feature men who are writers or poets, and the primary task of the female narrator-character is to fuel their vanity, a task she performs without fail. The creator and the oppressor of women is always the man while making similar claims never even occurs to the woman. The volume is basically a story of unborn feminine works, making *Found Woman* a kind of metalepsis that constantly contradicts the emerging themes of women's lack of creative capacity in the narratives *A Woman Migrant's Letter from New York* [Egy emigráns nő levele New Yorkból] and *Thanksgiving Day* [Hálaadás napja]. When we read these texts about what all women can do is mirror and appraise men's talents, we already know that she will be the one who is going to write the story of how women's fate is to be excluded from creation, how she will be the one who is going to write her novel and create the work that the men in the stories (Mr. M. and Dimitrij) do not. This way, women's writing paradoxically emerges by the suppression of writing, and the contradictory situation of writing that which is not being written forces the reader to acknowledge unwritten feminine writing; the multitude of works able to voice unborn, prematurely buried women's voices and feminine perspectives can thus manifest as a lack, rather than something entirely non-existent.

A phenomenon similar to the one discussed above also emerges in Margit Halász's collection of short stories titled *Whirlwind* [Forgószél] where the gender of the first person narrator may remain unknown, but the gesture of

commemorating what is lost and the sensitivity towards marginality can be tied to the trend of feminine prose. The collection acts as a chronicle, articulating voices that have been permanently exiled to the periphery and forgotten – the story of the inhabitants of Liget whose world as we learn from the last part is long gone: the inhabitants had either died or moved out a long time ago. In the last short story, the former passive narrator turned character returns to the village, leading to the reappearance of milestone twenty-seven that used to mark where the village Liget began but is now barely visible from the weed growing around it: 'It crouched in the grass indignantly like an unwanted, thrown-away garden gnome' (Halász 1998: 110). The milestone could be interpreted as the self-interpretive trope of Whirlwind where the work itself becomes a milestone, a speech act of commemoration, but we can also consider it a metaphor for feminine writing: the milestone stands on the margin of the road, secluded from the main course but also marking it, hinting at a lost and irretrievable world.

In the texts of contemporary women writers, the contradictory perspectives of empathy and (self-)contempt often mix in narrative evaluation, leading us to conclude that the issue of the delineation of femininity is often coupled with the uncertainty of an established perspective. These works can simultaneously presume reader behavior that both identifies with and distances itself from the text and contain contradictory interpretive possibilities, warning us of the contradictory state of feminine subjectivity. The reader often has to struggle to understand what the object and subject of the narrative are, allowing us to consider subject positions as processes in constant motion. The reading subject itself is forced into constant transformation and self-reflection, to realize that only a recipient capable of recognizing their own otherness and internal differences can enter into dialogue with the contradictory and differentiated feminine subjectivities emerging in these works.

The often confessional tone of feminine writing may easily cause discomfort in the recipient that does not necessarily feel at home in intimate spaces and intimate speech situations, having access to places and mental spaces that designate for them the position of the eavesdropper. This makes the spectacle and the perspective uncomfortable, which in turn renders the (invisible) masculine viewpoint visible and thus subject to criticism.

The works of contemporary women writers do not create a new feminine language, an *écriture féminine* free from patriarchal reflexes; however, they favor rhetorical tropes that cast a new light on issues of gender within the existing literary tradition. In the works of Alaine Polcz and Viktória Köves, the rhetoric of exaggeration and overemphasis as well as the dislodging of existing tropes allow

the articulation of a particular femininity. The prose of Virág Erdős writes new spaces for the articulation of femininity into literary communication and incorporates feminine voices excluded from discourse and culture into literature. The reader is struck by the ruptures of the progressive, action-oriented narrative, the continuity of reading unhinged by a great number of additions, enumerations and supplements. We can read such list-like enumerations in the works of Virág Erdős and Alaine Polcz, where Virág Erdős recounts the violent acts of men in chronological order while the writing of Alaine Polcz gives a precise description and critique of women's accessories, jewelry and clothes, eventually followed by a long shopping list. What these works have in common is that at certain moments they all interrupt the continuity of the narrative progress. This means that at that moments they all break up the established communication agreements between the work and the reader. The examined works can be considered more traditional and story-oriented narratives than the prose fiction of many contemporary Hungarian male writers, like Péter Esterházy, László Garaczi or Lajos Parti Nagy, for instance, but that is precisely why we can so acutely sense the ruptures and break ups in these works, confronting us with the irreparable lack of a feminine otherness inherently excluded from Western language and culture.

Chapter 4: Decentered Subjectivity in Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* and Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote*

In the last three decades the humanist notion of the unified, self-identical and autonomous subject has been widely challenged. We have learned that the subject is constructed in language, discourse and ideology (Althusser 167–168). It is ideology that creates subjects from single individuals; thus the subject comes to being by identifying itself with the 'I' of discourse (Belsey 64–66). Postmodern theories emphasizing the textually constructed nature of human identity, de-center the subject in philosophical, cultural-historical, ideological, psychoanalytic and gender contexts. Subjectivity has also become an exciting contradictory issue in feminist criticism since speaking for woman or as woman cannot be distinguished from identity issues and identity politics. As mentioned in the previous chapters, subjectivity is one of the main issues on which postmodern theorists and feminist theorists disagree.

I continue studying the same theoretical question in the works of female writers. My main concern in this chapter is how the contradictory question of subjectivity is raised in female writers' experimental fiction. I am especially interested in how these literary texts dramatize the co-existence of inconsistent forces: textuality and identity, in other words, decentered and centered subjectivities. I claim that experimental fiction is able to give space to the marginalized and silenced voices meanwhile it steadily challenges the very (humanist) concept of voice.

I am analyzing two American experimental writer's novels: Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* from the modernist and Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote* from the postmodern literary tradition. Both novels address the problem of subjectivity as it is constructed by discourse. *Three Lives* self-referentially challenges the illusion that it is the intention of the subject that motivates narrative successivity. Considering the texture of the novel as palimpsest, we can recognize a pre-narrative, a traditional discourse on women that relentlessly reproduces itself. It functions as a primary narrative interwoven into the textuality of the fiction. The picture grows even more intricate when we consider that in some places this grand and suppressive discourse is marked by traces of the repressed female subject. In Kathy Acker's novel, Don Quixote, we can follow an endless search for love that is simultaneously an endless displacement of identity. We can observe the

relation of textuality and subject from another side. The subject stands in the foreground as it is constantly being constructed by different, mainly contradictory, discourses. *Don Quixote,* at the same time, radically questions the given concepts of narrative discourse. We cannot have the slightest illusion of narrative continuity for it consists of incompatible and almost incomprehensible fragments. Fictional subjects, being aware of their own textual nature, try to challenge narrativity and it is exactly this challenge that leads to another concept of narrative. The continuous transformation and reformulation of the narrativized and decentered subject provides a new dynamism for narrative continuity.

(Subject-centered) Narrative Excludes Subjects: Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*

Considering modernism from the point of view of literary history and aesthetics, critics often claimed that Gertrude Stein's achievement from *Three Lives* to *Tender Buttons* addressed one of the most critical issues of modernism, namely, the problem of representation (Walker 1984, Doane 1986, Ruddick 1990). My approach in this chapter switches the focus from the problem of representation to the dialogue between cultural and fictional narratives.

I study how a primary cultural narrative intertextually interacts with the fictional female subjects of Anna, Melanctha and Lena. My concept corresponds to John Carlos Rowe's argumentation that the dialectical language in the part 'Melanctha' is not so much the representation of African-American vernaculer speech, but it is the articulation of a different concept of language and subjectivity, in which the mutual participation in the ceaseless flow of language is that 'makes us speakers and listeners, authors and readers'. This view, claims Rowe, anticipates the poststructuralist language model of reality and subjectivity. *Three lives* can be read as an experimentalist effort to draw upon the poetically and rhetorically rich qualities (and different epistemologies) of German-American and African-American language patterns (238–239).

Three Lives contains three parts, each is titled by a name of a subject (the good Anna, Melanctha and the gentle Lena). All three women's lives end in defeated, lonely death. Anna, a generous, hardworking German immigrant, works herself to death for a series of selfish employers and friends who take all she offers. Melanctha at crucial times in her life acts against her best interests, destroying the relationships she has worked hard to build. The gentle Lena is passive, dreamy, and always does what she is told. Her aunt forces her to marry the equally passive Herman Kreder. Herman comes into his own and his children give purpose and vitality to his life. Lena, unable to assert or even know her will, steadily fades into

near nonexistence, and dies giving birth to the fourth child. The three deaths of this trilogy are told in quick closing sections.

The titles of the three parts may suggest stories about self-conscious subjects, but when we read them more closely, we can also see another story. Not only do we read narratives about three women as three subjects, but we also read how a preexisting narrative telling how a woman should live reproduces itself and conditions the fictional character's life(story). It is a narrative that repetitively tells the stories of (lack of) marriage, reproduction and death. *Three Lives* invites the reader to recognize that the possible actions or articulations have already been outlined by this narrative frame, and the character has nothing to do, just to step in and out at the right time.

Lena's entrance into the narrative frame of marriage (arranged by her aunt) results in silencing her. We see her story as it follows from this frame, but have no access to her as a subject. It is actually this narrative that hides her. She gives non-verbal signs about her feelings after marriage. She is not as clean and well-dressed as she was earlier and does not care much about her children. Exactly what is happening to her cannot be narrated, cannot be articulated. Hayden White claims that only such events become history that can be recognized in a narrative frame. The events that are not mentioned, since they are not relevant from the point of view of narration, are left out of historical reality (White 20). Similarly, *Three Lives* calls attention to the narrative frame itself that highlights and hides certain aspects which forces the reader to recognize the hidden and unnarratable part of Lena's life. Lena fulfills the role which the grand narrative on women has assigned for her. What is not fitting in this narrative, remains silenced and unarticulated. It is not the case that Lena is hoping for a different life. Her wishes and desires are not even articulated here, the reader can feel only the lack that the marriage-machinery narrative hides. Within this grand narrative Lena dies without even having been born.

The fictional narrative does not end exactly at the point when she dies. It moves on as if she were forgotten not only by the other characters but by the narrator as well. She is simply written out by her own discourse as she disappears, leaving her three children and her husband behind. The death of Lena is reported in less than two lines. The next paragraphs tell briefly how the others remembered her, then the narration continues talking about Herman and the children, not even mentioning Lena. The narration (titled *The Gentle Lena)* behaves as if it were not Lena's story at all. In other words, the storytelling goes on, forgetting what it was all about. This discrepancy between story and narration draws attention to the

problem of narrative, that is, it is not only the willful subjects' deliberate actions but also a vehicle of narration that produces fictional successivity.

Jonathan Culler examines a similar self-deconstructive flash of narrative in *King Oedipus* by Sophocles. According to Culler an effect of self-deconstruction becomes visible in rare moments of narrative continuity. This involves a demonstration that a hierarchical opposition, in which one term (story and discourse or story and narration) is said to be dependent upon another, conceived as prior, is in fact a hierarchical imposition, and the hierarchy could well be reversed (Culler 183). The final paragraphs of *The Gentle Lena*, when the discourse outruns its story, illustrates such a moment of self-deconstruction, in which the supposed priority of events to discourse is inversed.

In the last two paragraphs, the reader can see only traces of Lena's former presence. She disappears from the given discursive space, but her absence is visible in the eyes of the reader. Lena's permanent adjective in the text is 'gentle', which appears in three different contexts in the final paragraphs.

> The good German cook who had always scolded Lena, and had always to the last day tried to help her, was the only one who ever missed her. She remembered how nice Lena had looked all the time she was in service with her, and how her voice had been so *gentle* and *sweet sounding*, and how she always was a good girl, and how she never had to have any trouble with her. (280) (Emphases mine)

The gentle Lena hardly speaks throughout the novel so the reader has no idea about her voice. When we cannot hear her any more, it turns out that her voice was very nice. She never had any considerable speaking position and she never had a voice of her own. Yet her voice sounds in the end literally as well as musically. The words *gentle* and *sweat-sounding* activate the sounding effects of language and associate the problem of voice to the figure of *the gentle Lena*. *Gentle* occurs again in the following paragraphs.

> Herman Kreder now always lived very happy, very *gentle*, very quiet, very well content alone with his three children. He never had a woman any more to be all the time around him. He always did all his own work in his house, when he was through every day with the work he was always doing for his father. Herman always was alone, and he always worked alone, until his little ones were big enough to help him. Herman Kreder was very well content now and he always lived very regular and peaceful, and with every day just like the next one, always alone now with his three good, *gentle* children. (280–281) (Emphases mine)

The word *gentle* frames the very last paragraph of the book. It refers in the first case to the husband, then to the children. We could easily conclude that Lena has completed the task discourse requested from her: she reproduced the grand

ever-marching and self-enlarging narrative of marriage and birth-giving. After accomplishing her duty, she can disappear tracelessly, nobody, not even the narrator needs her any more. Or is it really the case? Considering more the textuality of the final paragraph, it is striking how it deconstructs its closed and symmetrical structure. *Gentle* is originally Lena's marker, which seems to survive her. Lena's permanent adjective 'gentle' is separated now from the proper name, from its proper place and as a lost signifier or a ghost wanders through in the remaining text. We see and may hear the ghost of Lena as it haunts in the final text. The grand narrative could write her out except for a slight or a gentle sign. Lena's disappearance marks gently the discourse that outruled her. Not only are her forerunners produced so that she can reproduce the grand marriage-narrative, but her gentleness is also coded into and reproduced by the discourse that used her. This textual reproduction is comprehensible only in the fictional text. The visual and audible reading experiences of the word 'gentle' make us see the materiality of the word. We can see the body of the word that was produced and reproduced by Lena.

(Narrativized) Subjects Exclude Narrative: Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote*

The innovations of woman experimentalists from Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes and Anais Nin to Kathy Acker stretch from dehumanized characterization to the blurring of genres, from the exploded narrative syntax to anarchistic narrative collages. Kathy Acker's narratives are often mentioned together with postmodern novels, such as *The White Hotel, The French Lieutenant's Woman,* that are not only self-reflexive, discontinuous and metafictional but relevant for gender issues as well. These novels pose questions about subjectivity that involves the issues of sexuality and sexual identity and of the representation of women. They present their characters as gendered subjects, subjects to history (Hutcheon 166–170). Acker's narratives are also described as radically questioning the concept of narrative. 'She obeys no rules, accepts no traditional assumptions. She plagiarizes titles and stories, subverts prurience in serious fiction by writing almost clinical pornography' (Friedman and Fuchs 39). Acker's books refuse to cohere, control, organize themselves into an illusion of continuity and meaning. Thus she refuses to distinguish between fantasy and reality, her own words or those of others, she creates voices, characters, and scenes that emerge momentarily and then dissolve, characters who exchange identities and names (McCaffery 223).

Apparent intertextuality in her works considered as literary appropriation, plagiarism and rewriting technique has lead critics to read her novels with

reference to postmodernism and feminist theories, especially *écriture feminine* (Sciolino 248; Walsh 162; Rock 213) or *pastiche* as formulated by Jameson (Pitchford 2000, para 16). Scholars, such as Christopher Kocela and Marjorie Worthington often interpret Acker's citational collage as 'literary piracy'. Kocela distinguishes Acker's later novels (*Empire of the Senseless* or *Pussy, King of the Pirates*) from the novels published in the eighties, such as *Don Quixote* and *Great Expectations*. Literary piracy plays a more active role in the later novels: it is no longer just plagiarism of canonical male texts and the strategy of challenging phallogocentrism, instead, it creates an idealized model of society beyond the phallus (78–79). Worthington stresses the importance of space in Acker's narrative versus the time sequence. In her argument Acker often foregrounds issues of space and by creating mythical spaces she demonstrates how space in general are coded female (394).

Her critique of heteronormativity does not emerge from a gay or lesbian position, claims Annette Schlichter. By activating perverse identification, 'Acker's work demonstrates the possibility of a queer critique through the representation of dissident heterosexuality' (para 1). In the fictional scenario of *Don Quixote*, Acker performs the process of 'critical queering of heterosexuality within heteronormativity' (para 23), thus she demonstrates that the political program of a critique of sexuality following Foucault and Judith Butler, cannot remain the sole task of gay or lesbian thinkers but it is the responsibility of straight feminist writers as well (para 23). Reading Acker's text is a frustrating experience. Though they are easy to read, one can get lost as soon as one is drawn into them (Van Alphen 194). In Nicola Pitchford's interpretation, *Don Quixote* creates a new implied reader, involving three types of reader as they are constructed by the pastiche technique of narration: the academic insider, the female freak, and the male masturbator. Only this new implied reader is able to articulate female desire and agency for change. (para 31–32).

As I show in my analysis, Kathy Acker's experimental prose can also be seen as a desperate attempt to escape from the given discourse that suppressed the individual. The text self-referentially performs as a stage, as it is, like a dramatic performance, constructed basically from acts of stepping out. A character steps out into the stage of narrative and presents his or her short story. The speaking agents (Don Quixote, the dog, a voice of an 'I' or a personified voice of the night) represent themselves as outsiders, loveless figures. The entire text contains merely dialogues or monologues. The narrative passages of storytelling are enframed in a monologue-like performative situation always marked by apostrophe.

The novel puts into the foreground the problem of subjectivity in several ways. First, the characters are hardly distinguishable from each other. It is hard to follow who actually speaks. The mode of discourse never characterizes the speaking figure, in spite of the fact that we read only direct discourses. We see characters and letters that are not able to form characters. *Don Quixote* emphasizes the textuality of the figures; in most cases characters talk in the voice of public speeches, (political oration, academic lecture, history books, newspaper articles, advertisements). Further, we can easily lose sight of what the characters speak about since they switch the subject very fast.

The notion of narrative is deconstructed and reconstructed as a never-ending process. The intention of the characters does not direct the plot of narrative because the subjects have already been narrativized. This clearly invites the reader to listen to a persistent underlying narrative that tells us how social (political, popular or theoretical, sometimes feminist) narratives create speaking subjects. Paradoxically, the novel is kind of an anti-narrative that illustrates how the subject (that has been considered earlier as narrative constituent) is created by narrative. Facing the detached and decentered subjects means to lose sight of narrative continuity. More correctly, the notion of narrative continuity is subverted and transformed. As the subject is always in progression, in a constant state of transformation and contradiction, it is the process of the subject's transformation that provides the process of a different kind of narrative continuity.

Don Quixote is a visionary journey through American history from the viewpoint of a female traveler, called Don Quixote. The narrative conception of the novel is based on displacements of signifiers, namely Don Quixote, the well-known dreamer figure of western literary tradition, becomes the subject of a dream. The main character (as a subject) is already textualized and the main discourse of the novel, the dream, is already marked by a previous subject. Don Quixote is an already textualized figure, but the new context retrospectively situates him into an active subject position. The female Don Quixote wants to save the world as a knight should do but in this case she has another mission, as well: find love in the world. The notion of love here, as well as in her other novels, is highly questionable. As Van Alphen observes in *Blood and Guts,* 'desire for love is articulated in such a naive, idealistic and childish way that readers can only read it as ironic' (Van Alphen 196). One might also interpret these references to love as texts that circulate all over in our present culture, love as it is textualized for everyday consumption. *Don Quixote* recalls and reevaluates the picaresque tradition of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and it develops further its subversive character. Cervantes' work is written against the tradition of chivalric romances, thus Acker's

returning to the notion of love puts Cervantes' *Don Quixote* into a double mirror. It mirrors *Don Quixote* as it mirrors court literature. Don Quixote, the dreamer is taken 'literally', as a whole novel is a dream at night. (The subtitle is: *which was a dream*, and the main parts of the novel are: *The Beginning of Night*, *Other Texts*, *The End of Night*). The story of the *knight* then, as a further displacement, turns to be the story of the *night*.

We see the night side and the female side of *Don Quixote*, and follow how she wanders through the history of the United States experiencing the events from a dark aspect. The concepts of knight and night mutually reflect on and transform each other. Night dehumanizes the figure of Don Quixote, she falls apart into incoherent fragments of dreamlike visions. Night, on the other hand, turns out to be a person. It speaks as a real character and joins the adventures of Don Quixote. This vivid textual play occurs throughout the novel in which the notions of night and knight mutually subvert and enrich each other. The slight difference between *knight* and *night* is conceivable only in writing just like the *a* in Derrida's concept of différance. Let us see a few random examples.

> 'What, then, is crime? the knight asked no one …
>
> 'This is the human condition.' Don Quixote said.
>
> 'I was in the middle of my life when I found myself in a dark wood, for I no longer knew my way…' the night began again. (183)
>
> 'If I was dreaming, I am dreaming,' concluded the night. (184)
>
> 'This night I am mad,' Don Quixote concluded profoundly. (193)

Night, as the time-space structure of the novel steadily becomes a personified notion. Night steps out from the background, the scene or the stage and presents itself as a figure. Not only does Night turn out to be a character, but he becomes a dreamer, just like Don Quixote, the knight. Don Quixote, on the other hand, absorbs images usually associated with night, here for instance madness.

At one point Don Quixote talks about young women who decide to transcend the border of (patriarchal) culture. A female teacher and girls from a dormitory walk down at night to a crypt, where they learn lesbian sex from each other. They are undertaking a special adventurous journey to the body. They discover new lands, unknown feelings, unique erotic zones of the female body. It is a special journey to the night of our culture and it is a new, a gendered reconceptualization of the picaresque literary tradition, as well. 'Have the courage of your sex, a sex that has endured unendurable pain: be a young knight for tonight, you'll learn something' (163). The teacher wants to liberate their students from

all that they have been taught. She forces them to experience the moment of a pure, a non-cultural female knowledge, a pure bodily perception. This secession, however, immediately subverts itself as it cannot escape language as culture. The pure experience of sex is already inscribed in the multiple meanings of the word *sex*: sex as action and sex as a biological notion. It is an experiment to get to the 'real' self, not to the culturally constructed self. The teacher requires 'innocent' eyes and voice. The play of *différance* occurs two more times in the above single sentence (*endured- unendurable*, *knight- tonight*) reminding the reader of the ubiquitous and unavoidable nature of textuality.

> 'Does this mean physical sensation's stronger for you when physical pain's involved?'
>
> 'I'm too young to know.'
>
> 'I'm too young to know.'
>
> 'Age has nothing to do with perception or knowledge. I'm not asking you what you've been taught or about your false self.' (171)
>
> 'Delbéne said, 'What do *you* perceive? *You* must speak. Here, all of us who're women, who no longer have men around us, in the death of Europe this crypt, must now speak.' (172) (Acker's emphases)

Strangely enough, the girls refuse to speak. They cannot fill in the assigned position of *you* with their 'I's. They refuse to talk in an authentic non-patriarchal and pure feminine voice about their love experience. Finally the teacher screams at her students:

> 'Delbéne: 'Shut the fuck up. What are you: women? Do women always wail? Are women weak? Do women never take responsibility:… Do women take no responsibility for their own actions and therefore have no speech of their own, no real or meaningful speech?'
>
> 'No,' I managed to reply. 'I'm coming.' Those were my words.' (175)

The response sounds very ironic. *No* can be interpreted as accepting the impossibility of the 'speech of own', or saying *no* to the accuse. Both ways lead to the repetition of the well-known term and do not open space for a unique feminine articulation of experience. The teacher's imperative, on the other hand, repeats exactly the exclusive rhetoric she fights against.

The promiscuous night-dream through western history finally recalls the Spanish Civil War, where the images of night and knight interfere again.

> The Spain of the Spanish Republic of 1931 is my dream or model:
>
> Many of the early anarchist leaders resembled the mendicant friars of former centuries: abstemious wanderers, proud to possess little and to be under-dogs, though physically not

> developed accustomed to the most strenuous physical battles and physically demanding situations: all to accomplish something-or-other. They were motivated by that inner certainty which by its very being denies human leadership and any hierarchy except for that of gentleness and kindness. The anarchists, being nights, were knights. (204–205)

One can read this part as a self-interpretive, *mise en abyme* figure. The entire text is an anarchist, lonely, under-dog wandering, that does not obey any hierarchy, any totalizing narrative rule. Gentleness and kindness can never be associated with this text, only as a negative concept that the work always lacks and searches for.

Finally, the vision of night ends with a simple sentence: 'The night fell.' It may refer to the end of the night but also to the failure and the fall of the knight's enterprise. The great adventure, the colorful and miserable carnival, the transformations of the always escaping characters end up in a single figure. With its simplicity, it is a painful admission of not finding any comforting resolution, any reassuring formation of a new identity. Yet, the knight's failure dissolves in a language play that resists any closure and opens up the possibility for further (textual) wandering.

By way of a summary I conclude that *Three Lives* problematizes how a suppressive narrative excludes the voice of a woman and finally gives a chance for the articulation of the female point of view; this voice is not the speech of a self-confident and coherent subject but the textual play and the sounding effect of literary language. In Kathy Acker's novel, the failure to find a coherent, non-narrativized identity and the failure to complete the mission lead to an unique and open concept of narrative. As the inexhaustible textuality of the novels illustrated, the concepts of subject and discourse cannot be clearly distinguished. The concepts appear in many figures, in figures of speech and in figures of characters. In *Three Lives*, they appear in a controversial and competitive relation to each other, in *Don Quixote,* they turn into each other in many ways like knight and night occur together. Discourse and subject are continuously creating and undermining each other within narrative continuity which forces the reader to consider the impossibility of fixing the subject that is essential for a gendered narrative subjectivity. Narrative subjectivity is an always transforming, self-questioning and self-referential process involving the reader's eyes and 'I's as well.

Chapter 5: Speaking from the Margin: Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* and Agáta Gordon's *Goat Rouge* [Kecskerúzs]

The various feminist projects converge on the idea that language (understood in its widest sense, as the varied system of discourses through which the world becomes constructed) is the primary cultural agency through which the masculine dominates and represses the feminine. To effect a change at all, it is necessary to undermine language from within, or to mark the ways in which language reveals its own undermining. In much feminist thought, language is understood as a wholly phallogocentric and monolithic domain, which has no place for the 'woman' who becomes in her difference and otherness the figure for all that remains repressed and silenced (Showalter 1991: 336). In this chapter, I am analyzing another two works by women writers that foreground the issues of marginality and textuality, in other words, the issues of centered and decentered identity. They belong to different literary traditions: Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* to the American modernist, and Agáta Gordon's *Goat Rouge* [Kecskerúzs] to the contemporary Hungarian literary context. The reason I read them together is that they both address the problem of representing female marginal positions constructed by discourse and they both question the figure of the implied reader as an united and fixed identity. Also, they are exemplary works of an experimentalist feminine literary discourse that has a long tradition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Friedman and Fuchs (1989) summarize:

> Although the woman in the text may be the particular woman writer, in the case of twentieth-century women experimental writers, the woman in the text is also an effect of the textual practice of breaking patriarchal fictional forms; the radical forms — nonlinear, nonhierarchical, and decentering — are, in themselves, a way of writing the feminine. In subverting traditional modes of narrative, writers from Gertrude Stein, Dorothy Richardson, and Virginia Woolf to Christine Brooke-Rose, Eva Figes, and Kathy Acker have been undermining the patriarchal assumptions that inform these narrative modes. In exploding dominant forms, women experimental writers not only assail the social structure, but also produce an alternate fictional space, a space in which the feminine, marginalized in traditional fiction and patriarchal culture, can be expressed. (3–4)

Thus, one of the most important characteristics of women's experimental writing is that a certain marginal and feminine speaking position is accompanied by the

radical questioning of traditional literary forms. The focus of my interest in this paper is the relation between experimentalist textual devices and the marginal, feminine speaking position.

Tender Buttons is often considered to be a pure language play that departs from familiar conventions and celebrates the free play of writing. It is not easy to decide wether we should read it as poetry or as prose. Agáta Gordon's work also stays somewhere between poetry and fiction since most of its chapters start with a poem that introduces the following narrative. The narrative parts are dissected into paragraphs that have no punctuation. The semantics of the sentences are basically recognizable but the syntax is ambiguous most of the time. *Tender Buttons* is often interpreted as expressing female points of view, mainly those of lesbianism. *Goat Rouge* clearly raises the issues of homosexuality, for the narrator is a lesbian woman who speaks about the hardships of her love affairs. The main similarity I am interested in is the *joint appearance* of marginality (as theme and as speaking position) and experimental literary language. I am looking for an answer to the question of what happens to the reader when he or she is faced with the close connection between language games and lesbian points of view. Analyzing recent essays on Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons,* I will focus on the problem of the narrative of reading. I intend to illustrate that these underlying narratives naturalize and assimilate the strangeness and otherness of the work. I will argue that while experiencing the position of the *other* during the reading and interpreting process, the reader, in both cases, may realize the otherness within him or herself that challenges the notion of the reader as a coherent and stable identity.

Gertrude Stein's experimental language plays had been considered unreadable, or meaningless, for a long time. A reassessing of Stein's work has been developed throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Employing a number of critical perspectives — poststructuralist, feminist, psychoanalytic — this contemporary renaissance in Stein criticism has opened multiple new configurations of meaning in her works. It is definitely the merit of recent Stein criticism that it made Stein's critique of representation available for contemporary readers. In other words, by offering coherent interpretations, critics made Stein's texts accessible and readable. I am interested in the underlying contradiction of these readings, namely, how it is possible to interpret a text that obviously challenges the reader's interpretative strategies.

Play on Words and Play with the Reader: Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*

From *Three Lives* to *Tender Buttons* Gertrude Stein created a series of texts that engage, relatively early and in a radical faction, what we have come to recognize

as one of the most critical issues of modernist art: the problem of representation. *Three Lives* was her first major assault on the conventions governing literary representation in the nineteenth century. This text gradually came to be regarded as a central force in reshaping the tradition of American fiction in the twentieth century. *Tender Buttons* enacts the principles of fragmentation and difference and celebrates the free play of writing as a combinative game limited only by systematic laws of language.

Tender Buttons describes a female world of domestic objects and rituals — of dresses, hats, tables and curtains, mealtimes and bedtimes, cleanliness, and dirt. The iconography of domestic life dominates the text. But in the artful rearrangement of these details, the text models a world in which objects, food, and rooms are liberated from their normal subordination to human routines and purposes. (Walker 1986: 127). According to Walker, the particular pleasure that *Tender Buttons* provides is this kind of artful reordering of the familiar world. Beginning with Cézanne's and Picasso's still lives, modernist artists have revealed the strangeness of familiar objects. Duchamp's famous exhibition of the urinal inaugurated a new fascination with 'found objects', removed from their normal contexts and habituating functions. Oppenheims's fur cup and, more recently Oldenburg's fans and other 'soft' re-creations of manufactured objects transgress the order of everyday experience more violently, by transforming these domestic objects into bizarre artifacts that totally violate the functionality of cups and fans. Stein's objects cannot be seen or touched. But concrete nouns and adjectives call things to mind, and syntax can bind them together in startling new combinations (Walker 1986: 128).

Other scholars (Rowe, 2003; Scherr, 2007; Chevaillier 2008; Bombacy 2012) tend to highlight the differences and not the similarities between high modernism and Stein's modernist aesthetics. For example, Rebecca Scherr argues that Stein's belief in the materiality of language is related to its tactile quality. She proposes that in *Tender Buttons* Stein invented a 'tactile aesthetics' that postulates new forms of cognition based on the qualities of touch. She illustrates that *Tender Buttons* and the erotic poem *Lifting Belly* seem to ask their readers to change their reading habits and to engage with a kind of textual touch in comprehending the texts (2007: 196).

Flore Chevaillier continues Rebecca Scherr's argumentation on Stein's conception of the materiality of language, and she illustrates this in her analysis of some poems in *Tender Buttons* saying that Stein links her written word to the respiration accompanying speech and leads us to understand her poetry as a metaphor of the breathing body (Chevaillier 2008: 449). Nancy Bombacy interprets Stein's

writing techniques as expressing a critical attitude towards high modernist tendencies which celebrate male genius and marginalize female authors. She claims that *Tender Buttons* challenges established social and linguistic norms in a literary style that resembles autistic forms of perception and speech patterns (2012: 134).

Ellen E. Berry, in her study on Stein, *Curved Thought and Textual Wandering: Gertrude Stein's Postmodernism* (1992) and Teresa de Lauretis, in her book, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (1984) raised many of the questions informing my project here. Reviewing feminist interpretations of Stein, Berry identifies two narratives of reading in them. One implies the narrative of the struggle against the Father. This assessment recounts the tale of the woman writer's struggle against internal and external patriarchal censors. In this scenario of reading Stein's texts are anti-authoritarian, inscribing her sometimes playful, often painful efforts to transgress phallocentric norms, logic and structures. The other narrative of reading follows an escape scenario: Stein's texts escape from the law of the Father to an intersubjective space of perfect mutuality. Stein's texts permit and affirm a kind of writing (*écriture feminine*, women's writing or experimental writing) in which the artist unmakes patriarchal structure by inscribing an other-than-Oedipal measure of desire. As readers, we play blissfully with her texts and wander through the text instead of controlling and mastering it (1992: 12–15).

Berry points at a dichotomy inherent in the feminist narratives of confrontation and escape. She claims that these narratives of reading prevent us from acknowledging the pains and desires evoked in the reader and the difference of the other woman with whom we are engaged in our textual dialogue. 'Stein's works remind us that we cannot always know the other's desire and that we may not always speak for or with the other woman whom we see in order to explain from a feminist perspective' (34). She argues for a reading perspective that moves beyond the above narratives. Stein's 'unreadable' texts 'help to suggest the necessity for and the difficulty of moving beyond the oppositions implicit in the feminist narratives of confrontation and escape. Such a movement is necessary in order to seek more subtle and inclusive theories of reading capable of taking into account non-oppositional differences among women' (34). On the other hand, Ellen E. Berry admits that such a movement is difficult, partly because narrative is a persistent and powerful mode of structuration that tends to re-textualize itself in critical practices and institutional discourses. Difficult, also, because these feminist narratives of the reading process are enabling narratives that have grown out of real necessities (35).

Narrative, indeed, is a powerful frame and concept of literary approaches. For instance, when criticizing narratives of reading, Berry immediately repeats

another scenario, another pervasive narrative of scholarly discourses, the narrative of always moving beyond others' theories. On the one hand, I do agree that *Tender Buttons* challenges our categorization system and our basic concepts — the concepts of narrative that are included in this radical questioning process. On the other hand, I would be hesitant to make such a definite statement that we should move beyond the narratives of reading.

First, by adding more narratives of reading to the present ones, one might be able to extend the restrictions and limitations inherent in narrative concepts. It seems also important to define narrative when one uses the term narrative of reading. As it is well known, narrative is a highly contested concept. Not only does it have several definitions within narrative theories but also it is a widely employed concept in several contexts such as history writing, psychology, political theory and cognitive theories. It seems though that Berry means a certain plot, a scenario that tells the story of confrontation or escape from the law of the Father.

Jonathan Culler uses the term story when he talks about narratives of reading: 'reading is divided and heterogeneous, useful as a point of reference only when composed into a story, when constructed or construed as a narrative' (1982: 69). Culler's concept of the stories of reading is different from the former ones; it stays on a more abstract level. One could summarize his notion in the following way: stories of reading tell us what happens to the reader during the reading process. Culler distinguishes several stories of reading: for instance, Wolfgang Iser tells of the reader actively filling in gaps, actualizing what the text leaves indeterminate. Stanley Fish tells a more dramatic story. His story of manipulation is full of dramatic encounters, moments of deception and surprises, which portray reading as a process of discovery. The result for the reader after an unsettling experience could be as well a self-conscious understanding of the process by which we construct meaning. The outcome of such reading, summarizes Culler, is always knowledge. These stories follow an innocent reader, confident in traditional assumptions about structure and meaning, who encounters the deviousness of texts, falls into traps, is frustrated and dismayed, but emerges wiser for the loss of illusions (Culler 1982: 70–7). Reading Stein's frustrating and exciting play on words, a basic question arises for me: is it really knowledge that we gain from the literary encounter with the text?

Teresa de Lauretis' often quoted arguments on the nature of narrative logic are of importance to my analysis of *Tender Buttons* and on *Goat Rouge* [*Kecskerúzs*] here. 'All narrative, in its movement forward toward resolution and backward to an initial moment, a paradise lost, is overlaid with an Oedipal logic' (1984: 121). According to de Lauretis, narrative works authorize and legitimize the male

status of the subject, whose desire for illumination cannot be distinguished from his desire for stable identity (122–4). Put in another way, any narrative, (including the narrative of reading, I suppose) that moves toward revelation, in other words, towards knowledge, reestablishes the reader's identity as a coherent subject. The quoted narratives of reading are strongly based on a formalist concept of narrative in which a self-identical subject discovers the world, or the world of the text. The reader in these stories of reading is a coherent, united subject, a Cartesian ego. It seems that the notion of the narrative of reading cannot be distinguished from a self-identical reading subject. The concept of the stories of reading rests on the concept of narrative as logical structuration, and not on the concepts that emphasize the discursive characteristics of narrative. Narratives of reading (even feminist ones) indeed become problematic in the case of *Tender Buttons.* The work refuses to give us any revelation, any sort of knowledge. Therefore, it undermines the concept of narrative as well as the reader's coherent subjectivity.

Since the most striking peculiarity of *Tender Buttons* is that it refuses to offer any decipherable meaning, I take this refusal as a poetic function that makes the reader's customary activities problematic such as meaning-making, categorization, and imposing order on distinct features. In other words, the text defends itself from 'approaching' it in the very literal sense of the word, and invites the reader to reevaluate his or her own concept of understanding it.

Categorization as a basic form of conceptualization is called into question in several ways. The reader is urged to face the problem of how to make categories with clear definitions and clear boundaries. Titles, for instance, are often misleading, which undermines the custom of naming a thing and then describing it. The passage under the title *A DOG* talks about a 'little monkey that goes like donkey' (26). The *SALAD* turns to be a winning cake (57).

Tender Buttons undermines the categorization system as such. The first two chapters *(Objects* and *Food)* are definitely written in nominal style: categories of things and categories of abstract entities. The names or the categories make sense, but they refuse any intention of the reader to impose a system, or an order on them. The unfunctionality of the system reveals the problematic nature of categorization as such.

In the first two chapters of *Tender Buttons* the reader sees nothing else but categories. Under the name of an object comes a text that looks like a description. Usually a few paragraphs, or sometimes a few lines. The typographic outlook raises the expectation that the text is a description, then it immediately violates the reader's desire to find a clear definition. The texts are usually nicely cut *into*

pieces and paragraphs. The reader looks *into* the empty container of the category and does not find *in* it what he or she is looking for.

Similarly, when we look into the third chapter *(Rooms),* we look into the room, but this place seems empty. This chapter talks about the room itself, as a frame or as a 'table' in the Foucaultean sense: 'a table where for instance the umbrella encounters the sewing machine, and also a table, a tabula, that enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected space' (Foucault 1994: xvi).

The closing section, *Rooms* seems to be coherent prose fiction at first sight. The title is followed by paragraphs that seem to be connected to each other. Of course, it is far from a coherent narrative; still the reader has the impression that one way or another it tells a story. *Rooms* recalls some typical conventions of a traditional narrative: a chronological order for instance can be clearly followed. It starts somewhere in a mythical past when basic distinctions and basic discrimination came into being. An elementary event had happened that has — according to the passionate and sometimes even furious tone of the speech — outrageous consequences for the present. 'Act so that there is no use in a center. A wide action is not a width. A preparation is given to the ones preparing. They do not eat who mention silver and sweet. There was an occupation.' The tense of the verbs follow this chronological order. In the first part of the chapter, the verb form is mostly past tense, and later on it turns to be present tense. Also, *Rooms* employs characteristic narrative phrases, such as: 'to begin', 'it was done', 'and then there was', 'the truth has come', 'it happened in a way', 'the conclusion came', 'the time came when', and 'then came the time for'. Therefore, the work recalls and challenges the concept of narrative at the same time.

We may recognize a fragmented story about a distinguishing and discriminative act, but it comes to the surface only at random moments. Most of the time it is a free play of signifiers that characterizes the text. These tendencies are connected with another one, i.e. subversive and displacing references to gender categories: 'the sister was not a mister,' or 'replacing a casual acquaintance with an ordinary daughter does not make a son,' or 'Then there is a way of earning a living. Who is a man.'

It follows that the critique of logocentrism that occurs throughout the whole text is connected in Stein's view to the critique of stable sexual identities. This invites the reader to realize the relation between the discursive practice of metaphysics and uniform sexual identities. Stein's characteristic language and language plays are in accordance with Judith Butler's argument that western metaphysics

requires a compulsory heterosexual order that retains gender as a substance and as a self-identical entity. In a binary framework, compulsory heterosexuality constitutes coherence or unity of either gender: man or woman. Thus the critique of stable sexual identities implies a critique of western metaphysics (1990:6–7). As Nicola Pitchford emphasizes: Stein's critique of representation presents a standard modernist view: the text is about the process of cognition itself. What may be unusual is that Stein presents the cognitive process as dependent on a gendered set of binary structures embedded in language. In *Tender Buttons* an alternative is presented to the heterosexual binary contract on which representation is founded. Therefore, the lesbian desire, which is often identified among the interpretations of *Tender Buttons,* may be as much about a strategy of representation as about actual physical sexuality (1999: 646–84).

Reading the text, we can have the idea that we are listening to a story but it is not clear at all what it is about. The voice of this story is sometimes passionate, sometimes cynical or playful using paradoxical or tautological phrases. As if a foreign speaker would try hard to explain something to us. We are carefully listening, are engaged in the communicative situation. Sometimes we are getting to grasp some meaning, sometimes we are completely lost and frustrated, but we can as well be fascinated by the play on words. We are in an in-between situation, somewhere between understanding and not understanding the text. Still, the communication and the reading process continue.

The reader stays in this in-between situation and is becoming uncertain about him/herself. Who can this 'I' be who is reading the text? As the text provides no revelation, just partial understanding, it follows that it does not provide and does not reassure any stabilization of identity. On the contrary, communication with the strangeness and unknowable part of the text draws the reader into a situation in which a person has to realize the difference within him/herself, one has to recognize the unknown parts within.

Chiastic Structures Involving the Reader: Agata Gordon's *Goat Rouge* [Kecskerúzs]

The situation of the characters in *Goat Rouge* [Kecskerúzs] are marginal in several aspects. They are students and young intellectuals with no prospects for any promotion. Typical objects and behavioral patterns of the 1980s can be traced in the text that seeks to reactivate the Hungarian reader's historical and personal experiences rooted in the depressive atmosphere of the last days of communism. We see students in rented flats, two or three of them sharing the same room, the dismal surroundings of the student's hostels, the living and working conditions

of young professionals, the clumsy official management and the like. The characters are dependent on the political regime to such an extent that they are hardly able or willing to realize this dependence. They are homeless in their own country in several sense of the word. Leona (the first person storyteller) and Izolda are a lesbian couple, who have to go through long and humiliating procedures to be able to live together. Izolda, who was born into the Hungarian minority somewhere outside of Hungary, needs to marry Leona's friend Lala. A Hungarian reader exactly understands the situation; at that time there was no other way possible to move to Hungary. Izolda moves from 'home to home', as the novel puts it. The duplication of the notion of home, which is normally mentioned in singular form, creates a displacement. One who needs to move from home to home might as well be considered as a homeless person. The unusual expression 'from home to home' also displaces the original meaning of the word. Home as a final reference disappears in a similar way as the final signified disappears in a derridean concept of language. And language is a crucial issue in this resettlement theme of the novel because one of the main reasons one decides to move from Hungarians to Hungarians is the language itself.

The awkward situation of lesbian love and the marriage of convenience with a man form a series of lies that slowly poison the protagonists' lives. The main characters' private lives are emphasized all the time, and the main reasons for the difficulties are marginalized by the storyteller. They are mentioned casually as irrelevant facts. The expression 'human rights,' for instance, is hidden even in the following minor remark of the text:

> The situation forced upon us began to torture all of us and no matter which end we tried to untangle it had already strangled suffocated scraped or paralyzed something in all four of us but in our helplessness we didn't even think about human rights it never even entered our heads since Izolda didn't really have any and neither did I. (Translation by Éva Misits)
>
> A ránk kényszerített szituáció kínozni kezdett mindannyiunkat és akármelyik szálat kezdtük kibogozni már mind a négyünkön elszorított fojtogatott felhorzsolt vagy megbénított valamit de tehetetlenségünkben sem gondoltunk az emberi jogokra eszünkbe sem jutott annyira nem is voltak Izoldának és nekem sem. (30)

Homelessness and marginality may be interpreted in a further sense. Leona hides Izolda for more than a year in her one-room apartment, which is provided to her by her employer. Then they move to a deserted place, to a small house in the woods, which is thirty minutes walking distance from a small village. Leona and Izolda's story is framed by another narrative that takes place in a mental hospital. Leona tells her love story to a psychiatrist, called Orsolya Hostell, who

offers Leona shelter, saves and cures her. But as the name indicates, the shelter is just a hostel, place where the patients' complaints are aired and receive a sympathetic ear; and Orsolya Hostell is not a person who is able to offer Leona a home. Homecoming, or arriving to any final reconciliation, never occurs in the novel. The continuous atmosphere of exile may be related to the language of the work: the sentences never end, instead they just run on into each other. Furthermore, the poems and the narrative chapters refer to each other in a way that does not provide a clear connection.

There is hardly any sign in the text that refers to direct speech by a character. The characters never speak in a straightforward manner about their lesbian feelings, so the reader is informed about this in an indirect way. For instance, other characters talk about their suspicion, or in other cases, the storyteller turns to another sense, seeing. Visual effects are often included in these descriptions of homosexuality:

> And then one day everything became clear so clear I had to shut my eyes and I kept them closed for months inconspicuously in class and in the study with my head down as if I were reading and I pretended to sleep in vehicles and in every moment of free time because the realization blinded me and kept me under siege for a long time with fantasies about a Sarolta-faced creature but I didn't want anyone else to recognize her in my open eyes. (Translation by Éva Misits)

> Egyszer aztán világossá vált minden de annyira hogy be kellett csuknom a szemem és utána még hónapokig lehunyva tartottam feltűnés nélkül az órákon és a tanulóban lehajtott fejjel mintha olvasnék és alvást szimuláltam járműveken és minden szabad percben mert vakított a felismerés még sokáig ostrom alatt tartott szüntelen képzelgésekkel egy Sarolta-arcú lényről de nem akartam hogy nyitott szemeimben felismerje őt valaki rajtam kívül (32).

In the following quotation we can recognize a replacement of different organs of sensation. It is not speech and silence that are opposed to each other but seeing and silence.

> I interrogated the faces to no avail I had to learn now of all times in this Asian place in a winter bath that two girls at home love each other right under my nose who according to Emese are undoubtedly openly and consciously lesbians because Emese never assumed that what she so clearly *sees* is what those involved do not and do not want to take seriously and set it upon themselves but bury it and will listen to its whimpers in stomach-churning terror for years. (52) (Translation by Éva Misits, emphasis mine)

> hiába faggattam az arcokat most kellett megtudnom ebben az ázsiában egy téli fürdőben hogy otthon az orrom előtt szereti egymást két lány akik Emese szerint kétségtelenül nyíltan és tudatosan leszbikusok mert Emese nem tételezte fel hogy amit ő olyan világosan

lát azt pont az érintettek nem és nem akarják komolyan venni és magukra szabadítani hanem elássák és rémülten es gyomorfájósan hallgatják még évekig a nyüszítését (52).

A relevant passage regarding the sense of seeing and focalization occurs later on in the novel. Orsolya Hostell and Leona analyze a poem that talks about the speaker's memory of his or her grandmother. Leona would like to follow the psychiatrist's thoughts, but all of a sudden, as an involuntary memory, images of her own childhood come to her mind. She *sees* herself in her adolescence.

I was honestly struggling to *see* the *images* she did but it was no use because what appeared to me in that cute oval was an unknown figure that remained unknown for a moment but in the next I realized with horror that it was me

I was in my best clothes since I was wearing my exam outfit a dark suit but on me it somehow looked like as if it was being worn by an amateur transvestite a boy dressed as a woman who of course constantly exposes himself with his posture and movement and my head only added to this effect for some reason maybe it was my hair that was half long and framed my face just barely this softens men's faces favorably but makes women look more boyish

but it didn't matter that my divergent gender presented itself in such clear expressive signs because the *musical eyes* didn't *see* anything of me I was standing in a happily drinking party in a slack posture and a tired half smile on my face as though I wouldn't split any further that day and *I looked back* at myself from the far depths of the sparkling frame with the understanding smart *gaze* of a loose young centaur. (Translation by Éva Misits, emphases mine)

Őszinten erőlködtem hogy *lássam* azokat a *képeket* amiket ő de hiába mert nekem az aranyos oválban egy ismeretlen figura jelent meg aki egy pillanatig ismeretlen maradt de a következőben elszörnyedve ismertem magamra

ünneplőben voltam hiszen a vizsgázó öltözékemet viseltem egy sötét kosztümöt de ez valahogy olyan benyomást keltett rajtam mintha kezdő transzvesztita viselné egy nőnek öltözött fiú aki a tartásával és a mozgásával persze állandóan leleplezi magát és a fejem még fokozta is ezt a hatást valamiért talán a hajam ami ritkásan keretezte az arcom olyan félhosszú formán ez előnyösen lágyítja a férfiarcokat míg a nőket inkább fiússá teszi

ám hiába jelent meg széttartó nemiségem ilyen világosan beszélő jelekben mert körülöttem a *vájtszeműek* mit sem *láttak* belőlem vidáman poharazgató társaságban álltam hanyag tartással és az arcomon már fáradt félmosollyal mint aki aznap már nem hasad tovább és *visszanéztem* magamra a csillogó keret messzi mélyéről egy feslő fiatal kentaur megértően okos *tekintetével* (85).

Leona, the narrator, makes an effort to see what the doctor means but instead she sees something else, her own earlier self. We look through double focalization, and see how she views herself. In her view, a family event emerges about which she

gives a detailed and perceptive description. In this visual narration a family photo with a young woman at the center, a kind of still life, appears in front of our eyes. The woman looks back to the viewer and to the reader as well. We are faced with an unstable and insecure homosexual adolescence. The picture is not clear since it is disturbed by the interference of double focalization. Not only do we see this figure through multiple perspectives, but also it is exactly these perspectives that constitute the figure. The reader cannot exclude him or herself from the multiplicity of perspectives. Moreover, as the figure from the picture looks back to us, readers, we see ourselves as we are reflected in her eyes. In this view, we cannot have a clear picture of ourselves, either. The reflecting gaze undermines the reader's clear focalization and clear image of oneself. The instability of the figure that stands lonely on the family photo destabilizes the reader's fixed identity.

The language of the novel is a lyrical and rhythmical prose language. The short chapters are usually introduced by poems that are related to the following narrative. As mentioned earlier, the chapters are divided into paragraphs that are not distributed further into sentences. One may follow a vague sentence structure, but the text often disturbs the reader's sense about the borders of the sentences. New information, an adjective or an adverb, are connected to the earlier words in a way that we do not know exactly if it is additional information or already a new sentence. In other words, certain phrases can belong to the former and to the following clause at the same time. An A-B structure turns to be a B-A or B-C structure, which may be seen as a chiastic figure. Rhetorically speaking, chiasmus is a figure in which the order of the elements in the first of two parallel clauses is reversed in the second, giving the pattern ABBA. Usually the repeated elements are specific words, and the syntactic frames holding them (phrases, clauses) are parallel in construction, but may not necessarily be such. Chiasmus may be manifested on any level of the text or (often) on multiple levels at once: phonological (sound patterning), lexical or morphological, syntactic (phrase or clause construction) or semantic/thematic. Chiasmus can also be seen as an envelope pattern, as one form of inversion within repetition. Others define it as the crisscross placing of sentence members that correspond in either syntax or meaning, with or without verbal repetition (Preminger 1993: 183–184).

The last two concepts of chiasmus, or chiasmus in a wider sense, may apply fairly to the present novel. Chiastic syntactic constructions are such typical and ubiquitous figures of *Goat Rouge* [Kecskerúzs] that they occur on almost every page. Let us see a few random examples!

> and so I spread my hands which was immediately and gratefully *interpreted as consent by Hostell stood up* and quickly began to arrange for the formalities while I had to wait in

that completely plain little room where I then spent one or two hours every day with her but right now I was still flustered. (Translation by Éva Misits, emphasis mine)

így hát széttártam a kezeimet ezt azonnal és hálásan beleegyezésként *értelmezte Hostell felállt* és rögtön intézni kezdte a formaságokat nekem pedig ott kellett várnom a teljesen jellegtelen szobácskában ahol ezután minden nap eltöltöttem egy-két órát vele de most még zavarban voltam (13–14).

Hostell may belong both to the former *(értelmezte, interpreted)* and also to the latter word (felállt, stood up).

I didn't recline *in the uncomfortably deep armchair* I sat huddled and stared at the magazines on the shelf below the table. (Translation by Éva Misits, emphasis mine)

görnyedten ültem a *kényelmetlenül mélyre süppedő fotelban* nem dőltem hátra hanem az újságokat néztem az asztal alatti polcon (14).

A *kényelmetleniil mélyre süppedő fotelban* (in the uncomfortably deep armchair) can be the ending of the first or the beginning of the second sentence.

on the big day when Izolda's train arrived a bit late and we came to our sublet rooms running to change clothes at *one past noon* all of us were in our best clothes and squirming excitedly by the stage door of the wedding chamber. (Translation by Éva Misits, emphasis mine)

a nagy napon amikor némi késéssel befutott Izolda sebesvonata és rohanvást értünk albérleti szobáinkba átöltözni déli *egy órakor* már mind a négyen ünneplősen és izgatottan toporogtunk a házasságkötő terem művészbejárójánál (98).

Similarly, the 'déli egy órakor'(*one past noon*) adverbial clause can be the part of two different sentences. More precisely, the sentences follow each other so quickly that they pile up (accumulate) upon each other. The excitement of the speaker is clearly suggested by the technique in which it is hard to tell the events as fast as they happened.

Beside chiasmus, insertion is the most frequent rhetorical strategy. The speaker inserts new information into the sentence and then returns to the old one. Chiastic structures are recognizable in many different senses. In fact, the figure of chiasmus is changing all the time, and it returns in different configurations. The continuous transformation of the figure, the metamorphosis itself becomes an omnipresent meta-figure of the text that enacts the way how chiasmus functions.

Chiasmus and insertion prevent the linear reading process. All the time the reader is forced to look and see back and forth in the process of making sense of the sentences. In the case of chiasmus it is possible to constitute two different sentences, and we cannot decide which is the correct one. Therefore, undecidability

comes into play immediately. The criss-cross figure of chiasmus is closely related to the metaphor of *woods,* that is a recurring trope of *Goat Rouge* [Kecskerúzs].

It seems significant that on the cover of the book we see a wood with leaves and bushes in a close-up focalization. When progressing in the text, one might have the strange feeling that one is walking in the woods. As we step back and forth and see which phrase belongs to which clause, it is like bending the branches and the bushes in front of us in order to be able to move ahead. During this process, 'walking in the woods' as a figure of reading emerges to us. The reading experience is like walking alert in an unknown forest and watching every step carefully. The concept of woods gains special significance as we come across it in different senses and in different contexts throughout the novel. In some cases it means a refuge from the culture that leaves no room for any alternative life. Leona and Izolda live together in the woods far from the controlling eyes of civilization. Izolda likes walking in the forest with her dogs like the goddess Artemis, and these strolls provide a mythological backdrop for the events. Interestingly, the novel ends with this motif. The dogs lacerate small animals in the forest. Most of the scenes of the introductory poems refer to wild nature with trees, bushes, wind, and birds. The metaphors of the poems often rest on this semantic field. The first word of the last poem is 'Erdő' (wood) and that stands alone in the first line. One may consider it as the title of the last poem. Wood, on the other hand, is also conceptualized as an intimidating and fearsome entity. After Izolda's leaving, Leona feels as if the wood moves toward her:

> all that happened was that what was outside before came closer and became more threatening and I had to withdraw into myself harder and deeper to find a safe place. (Translation by Éva Misits)
>
> csak annyi történt hogy közelebb jött és fenyegetőbb lett ami kinn volt eddig és nehezebben és mélyebbre kellett magamba húzódnom hogy védett helyet találjak.

When talking about the hopeless relation with Izolda, Leona uses the metaphor 'woods.' This is the place where she lost her way, from where the doctor may lead her out:

> I was also very much surprised how quickly the excitement of the new connection slipped into my deep apathy and led me out of the woods Izolda and I had stumbled into. (Translation by Éva Misits)
>
> nagyon csodálkoztam azon is hogy mély apátiámba milyen rövidke idő elmúltával belopódzott az új kapcsolódás izgalma és vezetett kifelé az erdőből ahová Izoldával tévedtünk.

In the final chapter the characters leave the woods behind them. After climbing a hill, a grand view and a wide perspective open up before them. For Leona and Emese it also means an opening of a new relationship. The reader also gets out of the bushes and branches of the text and almost arrives at a reconcilable solution. But at the very last pages the narrator and main character Leona changes her mind and walks back into the woods. This time Izolda's murderous greyhounds accompany her. The novel ends at this point and the reader may wonder if he or she could really find the way out of the forest of the text.

The relationship between the four characters, Emese, Lala, Izolda and Leona form a chiastic configuration. Lala marries Izolda, but Izolda lives in a love relationship with Leona. Emese is friend with Leona, but at the end of the novel she steps into Izolda's place. Though Lala married Izolda just because of the political situation, he falls in love with her, and thus assumes Leona's position for a while. The relationship of these four characters can be mapped on the four shanks of the letter chi, X (the basic figure of chiasmus). The people next to each other, Lala and Izolda, Izolda and Leona, Leona and Emese have love relations with each other; the people, who stay at the opposite sides of the shanks of the letter X, Lala and Leona, Izolda and Emese form friendships.

Izolda and Leona befriend another lesbian couple, Gerle and Paloma, who live in the neighborhood. They visit each other, stay overnight from time to time, and another love affair appears between them. The four people, Izolda, Leona, Gerle and Paloma form an exact chiastic figure as they lie on a bed next to each other.

> it wouldn't have been any easier if Gerle had admitted her looseness and told us how on the very wide pull-out bed where she slept inside with Izolda they had perhaps whispered to each other with questionable intimacy and those few nights when Paloma and I slept so deeply and innocently on either end of the bed they weren't cheating because of their fondling but because both of them realized there was an earlier beginning in this beginning that hadn't concluded yet but they still let it be born between them and then had to bury it like a puppy. (Translation by Éva Misits)

> semmivel sem lett volna könnyebb ha Gerle bevallja léhaságát és elmeséli hogy a nagyon széles kihúzható ágyon ahol ő aludt belül Izoldával talán félreérthető meghittséggel suttogtak egymás között és nem is a simogatásoktól volt mégiscsak csalás az a néhány éjszaka amikor mi olyan mélyen és ártatlanul aludtunk az ágy két szélén Palomával hanem attól hogy mind a ketten ráismertek ebben a kezdetben egy korábbira ami pedig még nem fejeződött be de hagyták mégis hogy megszülessen kettejük között amit aztán el kellett ásniuk mint egy kutyakölyköt (160).

The figure of chiasmus as a replacement between characters seems another significant version that involves the figure of the reader as well. The interchange between the characters can be illustrated by the following example.

… I had to withdraw into myself deeper to find a safe place

and usually I found one but it was empty and somehow desolate because I couldn't move in anybody the love or interest of anybody who could have been an audience to my loneliness except for Izolda's and I knew too precisely that this wasn't real because there have long been no real conversations with her except in my mind where I had installed her distant self that finally spoke to me and looked at me differently than I looked at myself. (Translation by Éva Misits)

… mélyebbre kellett magamba húzódnom, hogy védett helyet találjak

többnyire találtam is csak üreset és valahogy sivárat mert senkit se tudtam beköltöztetni senkinek a szeretetét vagy érdeklődését amely közönsége lett volna magányomnak csak Izoldáét és túl pontosan tudtam hogy ez nem igaz mert igazi beszélgetések már régóta csak az elmémben zajlottak vele ahová betelepítettem távol lévő lényét aki végre beszélt hozzám és más szemmel nézett rám mint én magamra (164).

Izolda, the beloved person (third person singular) becomes an imaginary second person figure who speaks and looks at the speaker. The narrator (Leona) speaks from the position of an 'I'. In Izolda's gaze she recognizes a self that is different from her own view of herself. Paradoxically, in this remote perspective the 'I' becomes a she, the familiar and self-identical figure becomes a more distinct one, yet it seems more acceptable and closer to the speaker's notion of herself. The play of identity goes on in the following passages:

that sort of smile is probably too open and careless a gesture from you more than what you would like to give, explained my secret inner Izolda with satisfaction and this made me pause

I wasn't happy that I was an open book again and I started doing a few exercises in front of the bathroom mirrors to make my face expressionless by no means unfathomable just simple and dumb where even primitive feelings only surface with a delayed reaction time shyly and hesitantly. (Translation by Éva Misits)

valószínűleg túl nyílt és elővigyázatlan gesztus tőled egy ilyen mosolyféle több mint amennyit adni szeretnél — magyarázta elégedetten titkos belső Izoldám és ez elgondolkodtatott

nem örültem neki hogy már megint nyitott könyv vagyok és néhány gyakorlatba kezdtem a fürdőszobai tükrök előtt hogy kifejezéstelen legyen az arcom még véletlenül se kiismerhetetlen hanem egyszerűen csak bamba amin a primitív érzések is csak hosszú reakcióidővel láthatódnak félénken es tétovázva (165).

An actual mirror is involved in the play that further multiplies the dichotomy of the 'I and you' structure. The multiplicity of perspectives invites the reader to look into the mirror, in other words, to participate in this confusing yet playful

game. In the end, it is hard to answer the simple question: who is who? The clause 'nyitott könyv vagyok' (I am an open book) functions, perhaps, as a *mise-en-abyme* narrative device, a mirror in the represented room in which the reader can recognize himself or herself. More correctly, the reader is urged to face the fact that even his or her own self cannot be formulated as a coherent self-identical figure. The idiom 'open book' in this context undermines another established distinction: the distinction between the literal and the figurative. The figurative meaning is displaced here and the literal becomes foregrounded. We have literally a book in our hand that makes fun of us. In a manner similar to *Tender Buttons,* the text reflects on us. Not only do we read the text but also it reads us.

The omnipresence of the figure chiasmus in *Goat Rouge* [Kecskerúzs], just as the radically subversive language games of Stein, invite the reader to participate in a constantly transforming textual play. At the end we become totally uncertain of what the difference is between otherness and identity. While getting involved in the undecidability of textuality, one step by step revises one's notion of the reader as united and fixed identity.

During the reading process we recognize the otherness of the text and that makes us realize the otherness of ourselves. We would like to read the text and approach it, but instead, the text speaks back. It is the text that reads us. Instead of a revealing narrative of reading, Stein's *Tender Buttons* and Gordon's *Goat Rouge* [Kecskerúzs] offer us another mode of reading, which is a self-subversive, a self-questioning act. Not only do we see diverse characters but we also see our diversity in the reflection of their eyes. The otherness of these texts will be noticed only if the reader recognizes the difference within him or herself. As a result, another mode of reading appears which is not a narrative of reading, but the figure of self-dividedness as a way to communicate with the difference of the other.

Chapter 6: Detailed Description as Subjectivity Formation: Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Jolán Földes' *The Street of the Fishing Cat*

Approaching Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* as a Hungarian reader, reveals that translation is the most efficient way to understand different cultures. Translation functions as mediator between languages; as communicating the significance of customs, family rituals and dress codes between different cultures. Though the novel gives account of an entirely exotic culture to the Hungarian eye, it is a very familiar story to us: familiar with regard to the mode of storytelling as well as to some of the narrated events.

In this chapter, I will discuss Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* focusing on the issue of narrative identity. Postmodern feminism and narrative theories enable us to see subjectivity as a multiple and contradictory site. I intend to illustrate that this novel recalls and recycles the figure of the omnipotent narrator, which was employed by realist fiction. The narrative mode of the Russian author, Nikolai Gogol is evoked and the reader is invited to comprehend *The Namesake* in the intertextual context of his prose fiction. The immigration plot scenario tells the story of two generations in contrast to the realist novels that concentrated basically on the life-time of one main character. I will illustrate that in *The Namesake,* similarly to the listing of the accessories in Alaine Polcz's case, the seemingly irrelevant details have relevance. In this novel they play important roles in illustrating the slow adaptation to a new culture. The narrative focusing on the peculiarities of personal life is eminently able to describe the process of assimilation and dissimilation. In the last part of this chapter, I will compare *The Namesake* with the Hungarian novel *The Street of the Fishing Cat* by Jolán Földes, which uses a similar narrative technique of detailed description for communicating the everyday life struggle of an immigrant Hungarian family living in Paris in the twenties.

After the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Interpreter of Maladies,* the reader will find similar topics such as immigration and assimilation in Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, *The Namesake.* It tells the story of two generations of an Indian-American family, called Ganguli. Gogol Ganguli is born in America and he is named after his father's favorite Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol. His parents, Ashoke and Ashima, moved to the States in 1968, and they settled and worked out their new

life in Boston. In the beginning, the narrative is told from the perspective of the first generation, and we see how they build their life and how they are getting accustomed to the new environment step by step. Ashoke enjoys the intellectual climate of American academic life. The children are raised in the American education system. It is clear that Ashima, his wife is getting into the most difficult situation since she suffers the most because of leaving behind the supporting network of family and friends, she does the most to recreate the Indian environment in America. The other Indian-American immigrants become their big family with whom they celebrate the holidays of Indian culture and share important family events, pleasure and grief, childbirth, final exams, marriages, and deaths. The film adaptation directed by Mira Nair emphasizes the mother's role in the story.

After the first few chapters in the book, the focus of narration shifts from the first generation to the second as the parents are seen from Gogol's point of view. From his perspective his parents seem to be static, a family who insists on their original background, while Gogol moves step by step ahead into the American culture**:** moving to college, then living in New York city, starting an independent life at a big architectural company. He lives his own life in his own apartment, and he is having love affairs with girlfriends. Yet he often feels at odds with his environment and sometimes feels inconvenient both with the American and the Indian-American girlfriend.

He feels equally displaced at the American and at the Indian birthday parties. The Indian birthday parties are usually organized by his parents, who invite all their Indian friends together with their children. The parents are having fun; they play cards, share their experiences and discuss actual American and Indian political events. Meanwhile their children can do nothing else just sit in the living room and watch TV tumbling over one another. Gogol is not happy with his own name, he feels his identity problems are incorporated in it. He officially changes his name to Nikhil, the previous name his parents gave him as a child. He refuses his father's suggestion to read Nikolai Gogol's work, and he does not even read *The Overcoat*, when it becomes an obligatory assignment at secondary school. In his review article, Nathan Oates states that 'what Gogol wants is to be his own person, and the novel exposes the fallacy of the American myth of self-creation'(2004: 178).

The Namesake has been translated into Hungarian (by Richárd Rákócza), initiating a dialogue between Hungarian culture and Hungarian literary tradition. This novel is strange and familiar at the same time to the Hungarian reader.

We see how people from an exotic, Indian culture translate themselves into the American world (which is well-known and unknown to us at the same time).

To Hungarians, it is a double transition, and we read the signs of American culture (brand names, foods, pop-music) as partly known and partly unknown markers. Sometimes brand names are familiar, other times, we face the empty signifiers of such names. Even in the latter case, the non-American reader can sense the significance of such markers. These brand names, just like proper names, are the untranslatable signs of the language and the culture, yet they are not entirely incomprehensible to a foreign reader. Paradoxically, they are the signs that call for experience, for instance a taste of a meal and all the surrounding feelings, such as the atmosphere of eating together in a restaurant. The Hungarian reader is familiar with the American literary tradition of using brand names of products. For instance, Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* was very successful here though part of the numerous brand names, that are listed again and again, hence characteristic feature of the storytelling, are not generally known for the Hungarian public. We have learnt these markers from the book, as if it were a text book, a catalogue of postmodern lifestyle in New York City in the age of globalization. We understand that these names of products, bars and restaurants, food and drinks are important social clues by which characters construct a hierarchy among themselves. Since in *The Namesake* America is constructed from the point of view of the Indian immigrants, the Hungarian readers are faced with the problem of whether to identify with the Indian or their own previous notion of American culture.

Another factor that may help us to better understand *The Namesake* is the often mentioned Russian short story. The various references to Gogol's *The Overcoat* suggest a reading strategy that may bring the unknown part of Indian culture closer to the western mind. In the next part, I approach the *Namesake* with the help of Gogol's *The Overcoat,* and will make use of intertextuality as mediator between cultures. In Hungary, Nikolai Gogol's *The Overcoat* is compulsory reading in secondary education. Not only are literary scholars or students familiar with this short story, but also all who encountered with it in secondary schools. Hungarian students usually like and keep the main hero, Akaky Akakyevich in their good memory. He is seen as the type of a kind-hearted person, an official who finds happiness in his micro-world unlike autocrats, who project their own inferiority complex onto the disempowered.

In *The Namesake*, Russian realist literature (Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Gogol) is a mediator to western culture. It is telling that Ashoke reads Russian authors in English. 'When Ashoke's English was good enough, he began to read the book

himself' (12). At the beginning of the novel, English language is the mediator to the Russian world, and later on Russian novels help Ashoke to feel comfortable in his new American workplace. The books of Russian writers can be found in the library which Ashoke, as university professor, visits every Friday after work. They are on the shelves and he knows very well that he can always turn to them. Ashoke learns from his grandfather: 'They will never fail you' (12).

Russian literature plays a mediator role among the Indian generations as well. The grandfather gives *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol* to Ashoke when he graduates from class twelve and Ashoke gives the same book to his son for his fourteenth birthday. A friendly figure, Akaky Akakyevich, our old acquaintance brings *The Namesake* closer to us. It is clear that Nikolai Gogol's collection of short stories means a kind of friend to the young Ashoke. It turns out from the text that the importance of Gogol comes right after his family in Ashoke's mind. He takes only *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol* with himself when he wants to visit his grandfather. Right after the painful farewell from his family, he turns to his 'friend', to Akaky Akakyevich, as if he were looking for immediate comfort from grief.

> His favorite story in the book was the last, 'The Overcoat,' and that was the one Ashoke had begun to reread as the train pulled out of Howrath Station late in the evening with a prolonged and deafening shriek, away from his parents and his six younger brothers and sisters, all of whom had come to see him off and had huddled until the last moment by the window, waving to him from the long dusky platform. (14)

His abandoned name 'Gogol', just like the ghost of Akaky Akakievich, appears here and there in the story, sometimes in the most unexpected situation. For instance, Gogol's wife, Moushumi, all of a sudden mentions to her friends at their party that his original name is Gogol, though he is known by all their American friends as Nikhil. The friends cannot imagine what makes someone to change his name. Moreover, his wife does not realize that her casual remark has touched a tender spot in him.

> 'God, I would never change my name,' Edith says. 'It's my grandmother's.'
>
> 'Nikhil changed his,' Moushumi blurts out suddenly, and for the first time all evening, with the exception of the opera singers, the room goes completely quiet.
>
> He stares at her, stunned. He has never told her not to tell anyone. He simply assumed she never would. His expression is lost on her; she smiles back at him, unaware of what she's done. The diner guests regard him, their mouths hanging open in confused smiles. (243)

It is never clearly stated why Gogol has changed his name. It is supposed that his strange sounding name and metonymically his unclear relation to his Indian

background, the in-between position of identity is what disturbs the character. The reader who is familiar with the story of *The Overcoat* may see some similarities between the literary figures of Gogol Ganguli as he lives in New York City and Akaky Akakievich living in Saint Petersbourg. The one is an architect and the other is a clerk. Both of them spend most of their life bending over their desks in a huge office in which they do not play any significant role. Yet, they both are satisfied with their position at the moment.

> Gogol Ganguli knows that each component of a building, however small, is nevertheless essential, and he finds it gratifying that after all his years of schooling, all his crits and unbuilt projects, his efforts are to have some practical end. He typically works late into his evenings, and on most of his weekends, drawing designs on the computer, drafting plans, writing specifications, building Styrofoam and cardboard models to scale. (125)

One can easily draw a parallel between this passage and the famous part from *The Overcoat* which tells how much pleasure the clerk could find in his copying business. 'It would be difficult to find another man who lived so entirely for his duties. It is saying but little to say that he served with zeal: no, he served with love. In that copying, he saw a varied and agreeable world. Enjoyment was written on his face' (Gogol: 2). Later, in the text of *The Overcoat* we learn that Akaky Akakyevich worked day and night just like Gogol Ganguli did. After introducing the office, the narrator continues with the description of the apartment both in the case of *The Namesake* and in that of *The Overcoat.* The focalization of both texts is situated spatially close to the focalized objects, as if the viewer were present at the apartments. Jhumpa Lahiri successfully employs again Gogol's powerful narrative mode of describing one's close environment, metonymically referring to the way of life of the hero. The metonymy is the space, in our case the apartment, that stands for (a period of) a lifetime. Gogol's apartment is an average small studio, just like the one of Akaky Akakyevich. Only the most basic, the most necessary furniture can be found in the apartment, but they feel comfortable here. They like their indistinctive place, since the real space of their activity is the office. Let us compare Nikolai Gogol's and Jhumpa Lahiri's descriptions about the apartments:

> […] one — and this is the most common case of all the officials — goes to his comrades on the fourth or third floor, to two small rooms with an ante-room or kitchen, and some pretensions to fashion, a lamp or some other trifle which has cost many a sacrifice of dinner or excursion — in a word, even at the hour when all officials disperse among the contracted quarters of their friends, to play at whist, as they sip their tea from glasses to the accompaniment of farthing rusk. (Gogol 3)

> The kitchen is built into what should have been an entryway, a space so small that the refrigerator stands several feet away, over by the bathroom door. On the stove sits

> a *teakettle* he has never filled with water, and on the countertop a toaster he's never plugged in. (Lahiri 126) (Emphasis mine)

Style in Jhumpa Lahiri and Nikolai Gogol is similar in many respects. One important common feature of their story-telling is that people and their way of living are characterized by their home. We come across descriptions of rooms, kitchens, houses several times in *The Namesake*. Daily routine, such as eating, eating out and making tea are recurring elements in *The Overcoat* and are often observable in *The Namesake* as well.

Referring to her first book, *The Interpreter of Maladies*, Judith Caesar (2005) also points at the importance of space and spatial metaphors in Lahiri's fiction.

> In her short stories, Lahiri uses the architecture of old American houses as an emblem of the emotional spaces between people who live in those houses, of the interior walls within the mind, of the stairs that connect the level of experience, of the doors that shut others in and out, of the exterior walls that would normally delineate public from private space but which, again and again, do not. (52)

Taking *The Overcoat* as an intertext with which *The Namesake* dialogues, we are faced with the literary phenomenon of palimpsest, namely that in his way of life, Gogol Ganguli as a figure of the novel repeats some patterns of the old story by Nikolai Gogol. Though his utmost intention is that he will not follow his father's advice, some elements and some preferences of his are recurring in Gogol's life as well, such as dedicating his life to his work, being always obedient and dutiful. And these are characteristics of Akaky Akakyevich, as well.

At some places in *The Namesake*, the older text, *The Overcoat* is coming to the surface. In this way we encounter how certain ways of narration had already been prewritten by the 'realist' tradition of storytelling. The third person authoritative narratorial voice combining with internal focalization and the linear plot-scenario are familiar to the reader from realist prose fiction. The plot seems to be easy to follow, yet it becomes more difficult, when one wants to look back, revise something already read, since the pages are full of small detail and average events. It is not easy to remember what one read and exactly where. *The Namesake* works like human memory: we remember that some events have happened to us, but sometimes we forget about the actual circumstances. Correspondingly, we remember that we have read about certain events but it is not easy to find them again in the text. Like in memory, we try to connect the events with important years and the years at the beginning of each chapter serve as similar orientation points. This narrative manner demonstrates the working of our memory. We can easily get lost in the seemingly unimportant events, but what we have for sure

is the general impression, the specific manner of storytelling, and the constant, slight inconveniency of the Indian-American characters.

Returning to the *teakettle* in the above quotation, we learn from Nikolai Gogol's story that after the long and monotonous work, most of the officials have not much amusement or recreation left, just having tea at home, maybe in the company of friends and fellow officials. Looking at Gogol Ganguli's apartment in this intertextual context, the reader has the idea that this is even a more desolate place than the small apartments of Nikolai Gogol's officials. One cannot relax here with a cup of tea in one's hand anymore. This is simply a shelter and not a room to share with friends. There is nobody to use the teakettle and there is nobody to share a cup of tea with after work.

The image of the teakettle comes back again some pages later when Gogol moves to her American girlfriend's and her parent's five storey-house. This is a negative reference again. The *(unused)* teakettle is listed among the personal objects that he does *not* take with him to the new house and his new life. 'His futon and his table, his kettle and toaster and television and the rest of his things, remain on Amsterdam Avenue' (Lahiri 139). These objects now are seen as his very personal belongings, as metonymies for his identity, which he leaves behind for the sake of his girlfriend and her family. This change in his identity becomes more ironic when we take into account the above quoted text, as well. He gives up something that never belonged to him, yet these non-belonging personal objects are meant to allude to a certain phase of lifetime. And these little things may highlight one of the key questions of the novel.

We follow a classical developmental plot: the character's parents, childhood, schools, love experience, and marriage (though in this case, not a happy one) are presented by omnipotent external and internal focalization. Yet it is never the case, that the character makes an effort and achieves something and becomes someone. Instead, the novel reveals that many times in his life Gogol Ganguli feels at odds with his actual environment. For instance, neither the Indian nor the American birthday parties mean unclouded happiness since he feels alien among the people who celebrate him.

One of the critics also emphasizes this kind of identity formation in *The Namesake*. 'The novel ends with Gogol in his early thirties in—as is always the case in this novel—a state of flux. Although the novel never feels busy or hectic, the characters are always in transit' (Oates 2004: 178). I would even take this claim further: the characters, especially Gogol, are always in the state of being different from themselves, feeling not fitting in, sensing some inconvenience with their closest environment. That is why sensual impressions, tastes, dresses,

and colors come to the foreground in this novel. These are signs that refer to the hardly expressible feeling of discomfort, a kind of homelessness, signifiers that point toward displacement. It is hard to make clear why his parents' old house of which the parents are very proud, is strange and somewhat shameful to Gogol. He does not know why he watches his mother's various saris closely.

He silently registers that Maxine marches in his parents' house without taking her shoes off. These are little annoying signs, insignificant one could say, yet these little signs call attention to the failure of the signifying. Gogol is not able to utter in words what disturbs him most of the time. The omnipotent narrator also remains silent on these issues and this is yet another deviation from the classical realist tradition. Nikolai Gogol explains the sociological and psychological situation of his characters thoroughly, but Jhumpa Lahiri hides this kind of evaluation in the various little particulars. The in-between intercultural situation is a constant inexpressible *différance* (Derrida 1998) which reveals itself in slight and not fitting particles. The entire novel puts into the foreground but details: kitchens, rooms, eating habits, conversations, i.e. micro-narratives of families, parents and children, that recount the grand narrative of immigrating into the USA.

The various details thus express how this grand narrative operates on the personal level. The *différance* played out by the descriptive narrative technique of *The Namesake* is marked by intercultural effects. To the construction of decentered subjectivity that plays a central role in any postmodern narrative identity, cultural difference is added in this novel. Let us see now Ashoke's reading of Gogol's *The Overcoat* as he comes under the spell of the peculiars of the book. It is telling that he does not notice the sociological aspect. For instance, the man of importance who refuses to help Akaky in finding the overcoat and whose behavior causes his death indirectly, is not even mentioned in his view. His view is a personal reading based on empathy. 'His heart went out to poor Akaky, a humble clerk just as Ashoke's father had been at the start of his career' (Lahiri 14).

> He shuddered at the description of the tailor Petrovich's big toe, 'with its deformed nail as thick and hard as shell of a tortoise.' His mouth watered at the cold veal and cream pastries and champagne Akaky consumed the night his precious coat was stolen, in spite of the fact that Ashoke had never tasted these things himself. Ashoke was always devastated when Akaky was robbed in 'a square that looked to him like a dreadful desert,' leaving him cold and vulnerable, and Akaky's death, some pages later, never failed to bring tears to his eyes. In some ways the story made less sense each time he read it, the scenes he pictured so vividly, and absorbed so fully, growing more elusive and profound. Just as Akaky's ghost haunted the final soul pages, so did it haunt a place deep in Ashoke's soul, shedding light on all that was irrational, all that was inevitable about the world. (14)

In Ashoke's perception of the story, first we read realistic details, strong visual effects (hard shell of a tortoise, dreadful desert) and strong taste-effects. We learn that Ashoke has never tasted these dishes, yet he vividly imagines their taste. We can take it as a self-reflexive meta-narrative comment on the various recipes and descriptions of food that *The Namesake* contains. By providing recipes the text invites the reader to phisically share Ashoke's experience.

How is it possible that something gets more understandable when it is fading away? The adjectives *elusive* and *profound* seem contradictory. The meaning, it seems, gets more profound when it is not readable line by line. *Elusive* raises the association of disappearing but here in the text the opposite happens. The short analysis of Gogol's *The Overcoat* by Ashoke reveals a major epistemological problem: elusive is not the opposite of profound. The latter is the inscription that stays beneath the vivid description, beneath the everyday events which are sometimes colorful, sometimes grey, boring and repetitive. When *The Namesake* tells the everyday life of an American-Indian family, the drama of the cultural shift is also present. It is like a palimpsest that is not decipherable in every single word, yet it provides the material basis for the lines written on the top of it. We are having many elusive details, many descriptions of food, Indian and American customs, family rituals, description of clothes and the like, meanwhile something profound is happening under the surface that cannot be told by these words. For instance, we get small, seemingly unimportant details about how Gogol is getting used to the Ratliff's household.

> He learns to love the food she and her parents eat, the polenta and risotto, the bouillabaisse and osso buco, the meat baked in parchment paper. He comes to expect the weight of their flatware in his hands, and to keep the cloth napkin, still partially folded, on his lap. He learns that one does not grate Parmesan cheese over pasta dishes containing seafood. He learns not to put wooden spoons in the dishwasher, as he had mistakenly done one evening when he was helping to clean up. (137)

Reading Gogol'story seems to be a smooth story of a career development without any serious obstacles. The Indian family lead normal and successful life. Whatever they start doing they do it well. Ashoke is a respected university professor and a respected citizen of Boston, who lives a creative and intersting life till the very end. He is working on a scholarship just before his sudden death. The second generation continues to extend the possibilities of their parents. Gogol chooses to live in New York, leaves Boston, the one city in America his parents know. His sister is engaged to an American-born man and all the information in the novel promises a happy future for them. Ashima often organizes family programs, friendly gatherings for their Indian friends. Everything is normal, nothing

special. Why is this novel so powerful and painful, then? We might get an answer to this question if we read together *The Namesake* with a Hungarian novel about a similar topic.

The narrative technique of *The Namesake* is similar to a Hungarian novel, *The Street of the Fishing Cat* [A halászó macska uccája], published in 1936 by Jolán Földes, regarding the narrator's perspective which does not exceed that of the character, and the present tense of the narration. It is interesting to see that in both cases the story of the first generation, especially that of the female figures, fades away and is written out of the main plot putting the second generation into the foreground. The first generation with its Indian culture is steadily becoming a background scene, almost a geographical site that situates the second generation. The Indian heritage is becoming a palimpsest onto which the signs of American culture are inscribed and the (Hungarian) reader is invited to participate in this intercultural and intertextual dialogue.

When comparing the two novels, it is important to consider that in the thirties simultaneous narration seemed a more radical break from the traditional past tense narration then it is nowadays. As Monika Fludernik puts it when studying the narrative strategies suspending realistic illusions:

> Although simultaneous narration should be another radical departure from natural modes of storytelling, very few narratives employing the narrative present tense are actually felt to infringe on realistic expectations. Indeed, few readers note the use of the present tense as an oddity, and in the contemporary novel the use of the narrative present has become so common that its function as an artistic deviation from the past-tense norm has been lost. (Fludernik 2001: 625)

As mentioned in chapter 2, *The Street of the Fishing Cat* [A halászó macska uccája] unfolds the life of a Hungarian family, who emigrated to Paris after World War I. The novel was published in 1936 and won the first prize of the Pinker Publisher's International Novel Competition in London. Though the book was translated into many languages in a short time, contemporary Hungarian critics could not understand its great success and up till now the place of this novel in the Hungarian literary canon has been controversial.

The novel tells the story of an average Hungarian family called Barabás. They move to Paris, learn the language, find new jobs and new schools for the children, in sum, they start a new life. The second generation is more successful in assimilating to the new culture than the first one, as it is the case in *The Namesake*. After the first introductory chapters, the narratorial focalization of the Hungarian novel is also given to the second generation, thus the reader experiences the same as in the case of *The Namesake,* namely, that the story of assimilation cannot be told

within one lifetime of an individual. The realist narrative tradition is recalled and reinterpreted from an intercultural perspective. The notion of the family gains a new aspect in both novels. *The Street of the Fishing Cat* [A halászó macska uccája] emphasizes that in exile contradictory political views lose their hostile qualities. Their role is rather to provide vivid topics for conversation within the international families, who discuss their emigrant experiences after work in a café. We learn from *The Namesake* that the immigrants from India establish a kind of new American-Indian family as they spend their weekends and holidays together. In the Hungarian novel the concept of the family becomes a small international community, which supports its members in surviving in Paris, regardless their cultural or political background. In both novels, the extensive use of the present tense together with the limited focalization of the narration gain significance as they emphasize the enormous effort the characters make just for the sake of a normal, average way of life.

It is the easy way of life, the effortless 'natural' way of living that makes the difference between the Ratliffs, the well-established American family with many generations of Anglo-Saxon ancestors, and the Ganguli family. No wonder that Gogol is easily tempted by this style of living. 'Quickly, simultaneously, he falls in love with Maxine, the house, and Gerald and Lydia's manner of living, for to know her and love her is to know and love all of these things'(137). And this kind of easy-going manner of life is the one he cannot provide to his wife, Moshuma. His mentality has been formed by his own Indian family: his father for instance cannot bare any waste. The cultural codes of the easy way of Western life such as certain restaurants, neighbourhoods, apartments and conversational topics are only available for them as requisites but not as 'natural' belongings. What makes these novels talking about the average special is that they highlight what enormous investment and sacrifice are needed for immigrants to lead an average life which is just given like air to natives in the happier parts of the Globe.

Conclusion

In this book, my aim was to demonstrate how contemporary feminine prose manages to articulate interest-oriented humanistic perspectives and their anti-humanistic counterperspectives simultaneously in a variety of ways and represent the issues of femininity and decentered subjectivity at the same time while also calling attention to the fact that the constructions of identity examined in the chosen texts cannot even be imagined without these apparent contradictions. Indeed, the close relationship of feminine self-identity and works written by feminine authors lies in the fact that the articulation of the feminine self often goes hand in hand with denoting the difficulties inherent in language. The conclusions of the analytical chapters clearly indicate that despite the attempts to call the separability of philosophy and literature into question, theoretical approaches cannot be mapped perfectly onto literary language, nor can theoretical positions be closely associated with the tropes of contemporary prose. My analysis also attempted to show the astounding diversity and multitude of possibilities inherent in poetic language plays that involve the reader and repeatedly ask the question of 'who am I as a woman?', thereby multiplying the scope of theoretical inquiry.

The 'unreadable' novels of Gertrude Stein offer the reader the role of the subordinate communication partner to enact and cause the reader to act out a role that is clearly located in the communicative space yet is incapable of articulation. It is only from such an interpretive position that a unique intermediary subjectivity can emerge, a state between understanding and the inability to understand. The narrative style of *Tender Buttons* foregrounds the vocal elements of language and encourages us to read aloud, producing a noise that alerts us to something unspeakable in relation to femininity – in other words, it hints at something that does not fit the order of communication yet is constantly voiced regardless. This noise could be considered the sign of the lack by which we are able to tune in on the silences of femininity. Similarly, Stein's novel *Three Lives* does not merely tell the stories of three women presented as three subjects, but also speaks of a preliminary narrative that tells us how a woman should live; however, since Melanctha and Lena are unable to enact the feminine roles prescribed to them by the evoked cultural narrative and there is no other narrative available, their stories are trapped in a space between the evoked cultural narrative and a cultural narrative that does not yet exist. It is the traces of the former and the apparent lack of the latter that may help us realize that we should perceive the mental topography of the narratives of these women's lives as a transitional place. For

instance, while the chapter on the gentle Lena is a typical example of feminine subjectivity as constructed by the discourses of society and power, telling the well-known story (of a woman who is gone without a trace the moment she has fulfilled the feminine role assigned to her) could nevertheless be considered as a counter-narrative of a self-realizing subject. The novel thus stands as a memorial to women who had disappeared without a trace, stops the repetitive process of casting them into oblivion and reinserts the ostracized voices of these women back into discourse.

Similarly to the radically subversive language games of Gertrude Stein, the omnipresence of chiasmus in Agáta Gordon's *Goat Rouge* [Kecskerúzs] invites the reader to participate in a constantly transforming textual play until we are finally left in complete uncertainty of the difference between otherness and identity. The indefiniteness of textuality thus involves us in ways that gradually challenge the notion of the reader as a coherent and fixed identity.

During the reading process, listening to the otherness of the text makes us realize our own otherness – instead of being able to approach the text and read it on our own terms, it is the text that talks back, it is the text that reads us. Stein's *Tender Buttons* and Gordon's *Goat Rouge* reject expository readings of the narrative and offer us the reading position of self-subversion and self-questioning where we not only see the diversity of the characters but also our own diversity reflected in their gaze. In other words, the otherness of these texts only becomes apparent upon the reader's realization of their own internal differences.

Just like the novels of Gertrude Stein, *Found Woman* [Talált nő] by Zsuzsa Forgács is also an anti-narrative of narrated women's lives where the creative activity of narration stands in sharp contrast to the actual story being narrated. Such narrative strategies are not uncommon in the works of twentieth-century women writers; for instance, the self-reflexive parts of Margit Kaffka's *Colors and Years* [Színek és évek] place a higher value on story-telling in the face of a life squandered away than the life the woman narrator had lived – between the two, it is her story that she considers to be truly hers. Similarly, the novels of Jolán Földes and Jhumpa Lahiri tell the stories of outcasts and emigrants disappearing without a trace to preserve them in our cultural memory despite the narrators' claim that they would be forgotten by future generations.

As we see the character of Leona in Agáta Gordon's *Goat Rouge* unfold through multiple perspectives, the reader is also reflected in the multiple cracks of the imagery and the eyes of multiple characters, rendering the establishment of a coherent subjectivity, the illusion of 'self as normal' impossible. Such subversion of tropes thus allows the emergence of a reader who becomes self-aware of their

own otherness and internal differences. One such trope is the use of enumeration in the works of Zsuzsa Forgács, Virág Erdős and Alaine Polcz that evokes the narrative mode of the *Annals of St. Gall* as Forgács makes an inventory of the 'good deeds' of the man, Erdős enumerates acts of violence and Alaine Polcz gives a rundown of women's accessories and souvenirs. The trope of enumeration leads us to imagine a feminine speaking subject that interprets the world as a series of juxtapositions without superordinate or subordinate relations. In this sense, the act of enumeration is a clear display of the narrator relinquishing her narrative rights and lowering herself to the position of a simple annalist; we may therefore perceive the use of the trope as denoting a lack of narrative authority.

The examined novels have clearly shown that constructions of narrative feminine subjectivity do not solely lie within the represented speech and thoughts of the (female) character or the narrator, but may also be expressed by several narrative-rhetorical ways, such as enumeration, omission, chiasmus and detailed description. Projecting feelings onto objects and tension between story and discourse were also characteristic and often occurring literary figures in the examined works. Though it may seem theoretically objectionable, these narrative figures were able to bring together centered and decentered notions of the female subject at the same time. The narrative subjectivity emerging from certain works of contemporary women writers can be considered as a self-questioning process that also involves the selves of the readers in its constant transformation.

The opposition between postmodernism and feminism as our chosen literary theoretical starting point placed the examined texts into a perspective from which new questions and new answers could be formulated; however, these eventually transcended the initial point of inquiry. Since contemporary prose tends to couple the emphasis on the unique aspects of femininity to decentered conceptions of the subject, certain tenets of the decades-old debate simply do not correspond to such formations of narrative subjectivity. Nor does this theoretical contradiction manifest itself as mutually exclusive principles in the works of women writers as both fields of inquiry are concerned with the possibilities of feminine identity and feminine self-expression. We may therefore conclude that the interpretation of a literary text cannot be considered a mere illustration of theoretical arguments; instead we must consider theory and literature not as singular one-way processes but rather as a highly complex, dialogical communication that also includes the 'backtalk' of the literary text and shifts from the starting point of inquiry.

Major contemporary Hungarian novelists, such as Imre Kertész, László Krasznahorkai, Péter Esterházy, Péter Nádas, György Dragomán, Attila Bartis

and Ferenc Barnás have gained considerable international attention. I intended to extend this list by female writers as well, and I hope I made some works by twentieth century Hungarian women writers accessible to an international public. By interpreting Hungarian and American literature from the perspective of Anglo-Saxon feminism and postmodern theories, my aim was to place the works of Hungarian female authors into an intercultural framework so that they become part of our global cultural heritage.

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Illustrations

Embroideries of Anna Lesznai

Image 1: Anna Lesznai, Bizarre [Bizarr 1914], HUNGART ©.

Image 2: Anna Lesznai, Ady Pillow *[Ady-párna], HUNGART ©.*

Image 3: Anna Lesznai, The Pear Tree *[A körtefa] HUNGART ©.*

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