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WATERWORLDS: ALLUSIONS AND
ILLUSIONS
(TROPES OF RIVER, DELTA AND SEA
IN THE POETRY AND PROSE OF ÚJ
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Abstract: The core idea of this paper is that the genuineness of attitude and the poetic methods of some authors stems from acknowledging the liquidity of the Mediterranean; namely, the diversity and its multi-faceted nature marked by constant semantic extension. Due to the Mediterranean, the linguistic, cultural, historic and religious self-perception of the spotlighted authors reaches far beyond the framework of provincial confinements and short-sighted historicism. The river, the position of the delta and the sea are inexhaustible vehicles of meditations and memory structures. They deflect the narrative from the pathway of definitive interpretations and fixed intersections. They, as water resource and a combination of territories, do not cease to denounce and mock the system of privileges and cultural prejudice. In the art of Ottó Tolnai, István Domonkos, Katalin Ladik, László Végel, Ferenc Maurits, Pál Böndör, Attila Balázs and Ottó Fenyvesi the question of identity is firmly rooted in the problem of birth, travel and migration, to the position of the pimp, the guerilla, the jocolator, the travelling musician, the Yugoslav Sindbad, the artist as a hooligan and the rocker. Their cultural and regional identity, consisting of several equally indispensable elements, has always favoured a kind of affinity which can be characterized as a complex artistic attitude. This attitude operates as a poetic dialogue, as a predisposition to local, marginal and specific phenomena, or as a sensibility for marginal ways of speaking, seeing and being.

Keywords: the position of the delta, the concept of the sea, Transhuman symbiosis, Minority literature, Voivodina, Southern Slavic literary scene, Multirooted identity

In one of Ottó Tolnai's early novels from the beginning of the 1960s, a perspective developed from moving backwards and, within it, the artist's process of registering the tinges of the river and the sea sprang from the elimination of the borders of the concept of space and a mysticism of colours moving beyond the restrictions of visibility. The concepts of time and space in *Érzelmes tolvajok* (published in the issues of *Új Symposion* from 1965) surveyed the dimensionalism, the synchronous mono- and polichrome stratification

to such degrees of refraction and void where “grey becomes a metaphysical category”. The “sandbag-hearted” river, the “Pannonian-powered” silence in the *Gerilla-dalok* (1966)/*Gerillske pesme* (1967), River Tisza evocative of a “skipping rope” in the poem *Tiszavirág* (1967), the poem entitled *Balaton* (in the volume *Valóban mi lesz velünk* (1968), co-authored with István Domonkos) depicting the “Pannonian bed”, or the “azure picnic” in *Ikarusz köszöntése* (1968) all defined the constituent parts of space and the time coordinates as a frame of content, as a unity of direction turns, entrance points, joining lines, divergence modes, as a synod of chronological antecedents, run-off processions and post-phases.

Around 1969–70, the delta, in accordance with the river and the sea, became the central trope of a transhuman symbiosis, and began appearing in an increasing number of prose writings in a concentrated style, alongside river valleys, lakebeds and the sea. Some writings from the beginning of the 1970s (e.g. *A novella* /1972/, “*alvilági felhők*” /1972/) make the abstract, but at the same time material feature of the River Tisza, Neretva and the Adriatic Sea, real. They tune and sound the “great, capillary instrument of the delta” by blustering, wheezing, rumbling and canalizing the waters, while in the volume entitled *Gogol halála* (1972), “the curator of nullities”¹ give an account of the spectra and forms of puckering and tangles. The living water washes away the colours, it is a metaphor of subconscious whirling and leaking, an all-devouring archetype, an idea which exists *abovo*, and the conceptual character of the river, the delta, the sea surfaces and intensifies in the hydrological richness of an increasing existential sphere in the second part of the seventies.

In his long essay (published in the issues of *Új Symposion* in 1969 and 1970) entitled *Delta avagy út a mai vajdasági költészethez* Tolnai makes the idea of the delta as a constituent of the beyond excessively manifest. The delta is a vehicle of a visual and an artistic transformation as well, a huge, transmissive area of lights and colours, while conjoining different kinds of softening, dissolution and mixing. The delta coordinates interactions, streamings, wanderings and interferences; it maintains the see-saw of leaving and coming back:

(...) the delta is a river and a sea at the same time, but it is within and beyond both of them. The river is the road. The delta is a SPRING on the road, a repetition of the spring, its never-ending possibility.²

The stoic landbound philosophy of the Minnesinger of the Tisza, István Koncz and the sea-oriented writings of István Domonkos are an important part of the poetic panorama of the *Delta*. What is more, in the second part of *Delta* it is stated that “Domonkos is probably the first Hungarian poet who has a sense of the sea”.³ From this viewpoint, the famous words from his 1986 interview conducted by László Pozsik become even more valuable:

In my opinion a poet from Vojvodina is a poet who has a sea. I have a sea. The Adriatic Sea. That is why, somehow, I had to integrate the sea into my poetry. Domonkos managed to do that already in the beginning, in *Rátka* with his vocabulary evocative of Rimbaud and Saint-John Perse. I did not have such words...⁴

In the irony-driven reflexivity of collecting, sharing and imparting we can hear the voices of the predecessors, masters and contemporaries. Concerning the later critical remark

¹ János BÁNYAI, *Könyv és kritika*, Újvidék 1973., 58.

² Ottó TOLNAI, “Delta avagy út a mai vajdasági költészethez”, *Új Symposion*, 59/1970., br. 3, 2.

³ Ottó TOLNAI, “Delta avagy út a mai vajdasági költészethez”, *Új Symposion*, 55/1969., br. 11, 22.

⁴ *Rózsaszín flastrom: beszélgetések vajdasági írőkkel* (ur. Mihály Szajbély), Szeged 1995., 71–72.

on Ottó Tolnai, it is a very exciting statement, because it reflects the experience of the sea, Ferenc Herczeg's Adriatic dilemma, while changing direction:

They said it was unseemly to collect my impressions, as a Hungarian, abroad. I ask in the memory of King Clarence: does not Hungary spread from the Carpathian Mountains to the Adriatic Sea? Does it only spread from the sand dunes of Kecskemét to the farm-houses of Szeged? I'd like to soothe my readers. I do not want to tempt them abroad, just to the sea which was ruled by the sons of Árpád and poeticized by the Zrínyis.⁵

In the sense of the antiperspective of the foreshore, István Koncz's statement: "the shore is my enemy" (*A szép Tisza és más*), Danilo Kiš's rule, "Ne budi pisac manjina" – "Do not be a minority writer" (*Saveti mladom piscu /1984/*), the process of listing the traces of the Pannonian Sea, the different boundaries of the Mediterranean, the enigmas of the Adriatic and the geological folklore of the Balkan are like "sharing the treasure, the common property with the predecessors of the individual".⁶

The "utopian sensibility"⁷ of Ottó Tolnai, as his turn of mind, unfolds the ideal and idea of spaciousness through tricky operations like creating reference networks and quoting in a way that is not so easy to follow. His writing may seem incongruent, but the capricious eclecticism of his verses, his essay-like thoughts, short-story tirades and the structure of his novels never ends in the incompatibility of circulation. Rather, they comprise the thematic matrix of gathering, transmitting knowledge and making tradition happen. In this matrix "certain effects of these worlds owning an unusual amount of 'material sense' are semantically regenerated by geo-anarchic space events, and they often start operating in their distorted semantic field, sometimes even as a kind of 'negative matter'".⁸

The originality of the way of thinking and the poetic methods employed by Ottó Tolnai, István Domonkos, Katalin Ladik, László Végel, Ferenc Maurits, Pál Böndör, Ottó Fenyvesi and Attila Balázs are secured by the acceptance of the liquid materiality of the Mediterranean, namely the disseminating character of multiplicity. Social overtones are very restricted, and it is not any kind of Adriatic mania or phobia, but a systematic framework of the way these authors look at the matter in which the sea, inseparable from the rivers and the deltas, is the horizon of understanding existence, the living model of the interpretative process of writing. The most important tropes of the oeuvres of different generations of *Új Symposion* can be viewed either as customary elements of amatory geography or emotional cartography, or as the defining units of a cultural map based on art, literature, history of thought and personal life.

For those who grew up near a river, rivers mean the proximity of the sea, the upward movement of the feeling of the Mediterranean,⁹ as it reaches further and further along the river. In the László Végel's early novels, *Egy makró emlékiratai* (1967)/*Memoari jednog makroa* (1970) and *A szenvedélyek tanfolyama* (1969), and in his collection of short stories, *Szitkozódunk, de szemünkből könnyek hullanak* (1969), the River Danube and the Adriatic Sea indicate that travelling cannot end, that subjects become objects of being on the road, of existential break-downs, the galley-slavery of power games and the purgatory of

⁵ Ferenc HERCZEG, *Szelek szárnyán*, Budapest 1925., 7–8.

⁶ Beáta THOMKA, *Tolnai Ottó*, Pozsony 1994., 132.

⁷ Alpár LOSONCZ, *Hiányvonatkozások*, Újvidék 1988., 226.

⁸ Kornélia FARAGÓ, *A viszonyosság alakzatai*, Újvidék 2009., 43.

⁹ Predrag MATVEJEVIĆ, *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1999., 69.

communities falling apart. In István Domonkos's poems, in the *Rátka* (1963) and *Áthúzott versek* (1971), in his novels, *A kitömött madár* (1969), *Via Italia* (1969), and in his collection of short stories entitled *Önarckép novellával* (1986) the rotation, the unearthly evanescence of the universal law of the sea, the chain reaction of floating and disappearing into new qualities become overwhelming. According to Ottó Tolnai, the River Tisza is a cradle; the bottom of the sea becomes a womb, the watercourse takes on the shape of the birth canal while the poet "recreates the geography of the poetic space by erasing its limits".¹⁰ The valley of the Arno, the deltas and estuaries of the Danube, the Amazon, the Rhône, the Po and the Neretva, the pattern of the different sea connections combines erotic imagery with mythogenic fantasy in his essay entitled *Nézni a Tiszát – mint radikális program*, published in the book *Feljegyzések a vég tónusához*:

(...) the river is an unending breach, an aperture which turns into a real genital organ at the delta, as if the sea were flowing into the river, not the river into the sea, the river is an unending breach, an aperture, and standing in front of it the artist can catch sight of the very essence of time and being.¹¹

Following her outstanding monography on Tolnai, Beáta Thomka wrote a detailed study entitled *Egy Tolnai-metafora visszavezetése* in which she pointed out that in the writings on art, poetry and prose of Ottó Tolnai the imagery of the delta, the gate, the spring, the adventure and the road plays a crucial role, while the problem of the position of the delta can be interpreted in the context of different sets of associations from literature, philosophy and art history. Ottó Tolnai had recognised the position of the delta in the texts of his peers and younger members of the Symposium circle about 40 years earlier. He always perceived Vojvodina as an imaginary space, a fertile ground at the meeting point of different cultures, languages, poles and civilisations of Central Europe, the Balkans and the Mediterranean; it is a permeable medium, a vehicle of streamlines.¹² Since Yugoslavia no longer exists as a utopian synthesis, replaced by different, new geographic and historic localities, the position of the delta remains the ideal type of constructing and articulating meanings.

In certain cultures there existed a belief that rivers rise from the loin of the Progenitress, the Great Goddess or some other patron spirit. It is not by accident that in Mesopotamia, Babylonia, Egypt and other places, the springs of rivers were seen as the lap of the Earth, while in several different languages the same word denoted spring, river, well, womb and pudendum. The real persistency of archaic institutions can be observed in the preservation of the term *delph* (womb) which remains in the name of the Hellenic holy site of Delphi. The symbolism of the estuary and the delta triangle shows strong etymological connections with the semantic categories of spring, the womb and the pudendum. Delta referred to the female principle in Ancient Greece and in the eyes of Pythagoreans, it symbolised the archetype of universal fertility due to its perfect shape.¹³

Ottó Tolnai refined the technique of taming and domesticating the river through contemplation, tactilism, voyeurism, intercourse, the connection of bodies and mutual rinsing into each other:

¹⁰ Tímea GYIMESI, *Szökésvonalak. Diagrammatikus olvasatok Deleuze nyomán*, Budapest 2008., 75.

¹¹ Ottó TOLNAI, *Feljegyzések a vég tónusához*, Újvidék 2007., 70.

¹² Beáta THOMKA, "Egy Tolnai-metafora visszavezetése. A delta lehetséges poétikai redukciója", *Kontextus könyvek 1.* (ur. Erzsébet Csányi), Újvidék 2007., 9–11.

¹³ Mircea ELIADE, *Kovácsok és alkimisták*, Budapest 2003., 50–51.

I am one of those who do not only peek, look at or watch the river, but also touch it and swim in it – merge into it and make love to it. Yes, I could feel the touch of the river, this huge being, as a child – at that time the Tisza almost stopped, it barely moved. Later I was really surprised that my childhood experiences, touches and hints almost coincided with scientific achievements. (*Nézni a Tiszát – mint radikális program*)¹⁴

In István Domonkos' work the flow and ebb of the Adriatic Sea is evoked by the reiterations and rhythmic variations of the avalanche of lust, sexual ecstasy and wrecking:

The motif was the vagina floating in the salty water as a medusa, the short description of which would require a Balzacian effort. The proud owner of that vagina, a Dalmatian girl, whose crotch resuscitated my scrupulous self, and suddenly it started singing under the water: there is salt!¹⁵

In the poetry, prose and performance art of Katalin Ladik the sea represents and intensifies the unfathomable boundlessness of the senses. The stimuli connected to the isle of Hvar, their waves imbued with dreams, encourage border crossings, the modifications of the personality and reaching new levels of racial and gender quality. The semiosis of the body sprawling as proud flesh attempts to de- and reconstruct the immanence and transcendence of the medium of *prima materia*: “Na magični žamor noći/ Komadićem ogledala rascijepi svoje lice./ Zagrebe u prljavu lokvu,/ Pogibeljno raste, ispušta smrad.” (*Kao da se more uskomešalo*)¹⁶

The sea represents a constant modification and multiplication of interrelated meanings. In Old Greek, thenames for it included matter, salt (*hals*), spectacle, open area (*pelagos*), road (*pontos*), or a general notion (*thalassa*), experience and event. What is more, the depth of its ability to maintain and eliminate was also significant (*kolpos*, *laitma*). The Latin expression *mare* used to refer to any kind of water: sea, lake or river. Later, the Latin equivalents of the Greek expressions were used, or they Latin forms were derived from Old Greek antecedents (*pontus*, *pelagus*, *sal*, *aequor*).¹⁷

In the oeuvre of Ottó Tolnai and other outstanding authors of the *Új Symposion* the dream-like cavalcade and abundance of the Mediterranean are never absent from the illusion of the lights and colours of the Adriatic Sea, and it is clear that “as a background, as a supplementary medium, the Balkans are ever present”.¹⁸ The Balkans remain an exotic risk revealing the smelter of the right encroachments¹⁹ of parallel cultures, revealing the battleground of clashing, intertwined civilisations. The variegation, sumptuousness and the orgy of the colours of the sea show a full spectral and modular stretching concerning surfaces, character and ornatation. But at the same time the sea is the structure of hiding, since its colours, besides the multiplication of shades, contributes to the process of the accumulation of shapings and reshapings. The unlimited, vast water surface generates dimensional switches and perspicacious transformations which derive from the multilayered character of colour saturation and intensity, of fluidity and the temperature of spectral disposition.

¹⁴ O. TOLNAI, *Feljegyzések a vég tónusához*, 70–71.

¹⁵ ERZSÉBET ERDÉLYI – IVÁN NOBEL, “Én próbaidőn vagyok a költészet műhelyében / Beszélgetés Domonkos Istvánnal”, *Forrás*, 2000/július-augusztus (<http://www.forrasfolyoirat.hu/0007/domonkos.html>).

¹⁶ KATALIN LADIK, *Kavez od trave: bestijarij, pjesme*, Osijek 2007., 88.

¹⁷ P. MATVEJEVIĆ, *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*, 144.

¹⁸ ISTVÁN LADÁNYI, “Az Adria Tolnai Ottó költészetében, különös tekintettel a Balkáni babérra”, *Tolnai-Symposion* (ur. Beáta Thomka), Budapest 2004., 64.

¹⁹ IVAN ČOLOVIĆ, *Balkan – teror kulture (Ogledi o političkoj antropologiji, 2)*, Beograd 2008., 37. i 109.

It is the harmony of the richness and heat-value of the spectrum, the jingling of the colours and the warmth and of the intertwined nature of authenticity and simulacrum in which the magical power of expressions, their ability to hide are further stressed, since the word color derives from the Latin word *celare* (to hide, to conceal, to cover), while it is as well the synonym of swindle, deception and perfidy.²⁰

In the works of Ottó Tolnai, the narrator, feeling at home within different linguistic circumstances and cultural frameworks, and feeling comfortable on islands and at solitary cultural memorials, does not stop sorting his collection rich in cult objects, living or dead characters, animal figures, scale-models and vignettes of erudition as a decorator of constant regrouping and tone-shifting. The consummation, immanent local history of the different collected or created objects of his own property-room, the later analysis of the personal system of references turning into self-annotations, the understanding of cultural joint estate, is not necessarily the result of the poetics of stock-taking. A supplying mechanism can play a crucial role in it, which is run as an inner fountain by the river, the delta. The pulsing of deltas and estuaries, the colourful, sparkling, liquid mirror of the sea stress the permanent cut-off of the position of the delta.

The border itself represents a delta: dissolution, losing one's identity, questioning and eliminating the self, almost a way of dying and a rebirth with surplus knowledge. The delta is a pool of living between the I and the Other, the domestic and the foreign, the small and the large, the spring and the aim, the periphery and the centre and between marginality-minority and dominance.²¹

In the poetry of István Domonkos, especially in the poems of *Rátka* (1963) and the titular poem the staggering, draining landscape stages the sheer Pannonian draught (see also in *Tisza, Tósirotó*). "The demented laughter of the deltas", the "blue death" smouldering at the bottom of the sea and dreaming about the "azure jewel" all depict the extreme dependence of the subject.

As much is generated of the subject out of the sea, it is the borderland of the person, it gains a contour out of its borders. Still, with the emerging living being, it shows the real, infinite stretching of the sea, the sea sheds light on the subject, flashes its borders, but the sea measures the secrets of the person to itself.²²

As the deceptive song form of *Kuplé* written in the middle of the 1970s covers a complex rhythmic system, the underedited poetic speech parodies the banality of the rhythmic pattern of a hit pop song, while the text entitled *Kanada*, built on the topos of embarking and setting to the sea, is not only a parodic morphology of identity in the volume *Áthúzott versek* (1971), but it also mocks the hypocrisy of the unbearable Yugoslav reality in which they had set the example of the autonomy-based Canadian type of socialist egalitarianism and retailing. Another poem from this volume, *Kormányeltörésben* with its masterful musical structure, its underrethorised linguistic sequences, its intonation evocative of the private sphere and syncretic system of views draws an original approach, it shows a rich rhythmic sectionalism which spread from poststructuralism and textualism to pop art,

²⁰ Michael TAUSSIG, *What Color Is the Sacred?* Chicago – London 2009., 22–25.

²¹ Erzsébet CSÁNYI, "Vajdaság: az átalakulás tégelye (Kulturális kódok deltája Tolnai Ottó prózájában)", *Kontextus könyvek I.* (ur. Erzsébet Csányi), Újvidék 2007., 53.

²² Csilla UTASI, *A fekete hold*, Újvidék 1994., 49.

from simulational infantilism to deconstructed fableness, while it stays purely consistent concerning the logic of poetic novelty and renewal.

The sea rapture and spectacles of the textual world in the novels *A kitömött madár* (1969) and *Via Italia* (1969), the aquatic sensitivity of the writings in *Önarckép novellával* (1986) are mutually formed into a whole by counterpointing the stationary nature of the surface of the land and the monotonous dynamics of the staggering waterworld. The sea is the element of ceaseless submersion, of ebb and flow, it seems to be an unfailing, a charitable source which nevertheless does not soothe desires, nor thirst; it embraces heroes, but keeps them at bay. That is how it deepens to become the cemetery of the garbage of reality, the swallower of sensual illusions thriving in bodies, the swallower of bodily interactions while compelling the act of writing. It cannot be just a coincidence that, some decades later, the speaker of the volume *Yu-Hu-Rap* (2008), written under the name István Domonkos Domi, recollects evokes the same feature of the sea: “sea / to linger to gush/ I learnt from you/ self-rocking/ joy/ indifference wearing the mask / of depth”.

In the works of Katalin Ladik, the sea, taking an imaginary and a real shape, has been the terrain of the simulation of language, the body and the I, the fixed starting point of emotional empathy and erotic sensibility since the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. Their latest representation can be read in the poems of *Belső vízözön* (2011). In the early works of László Végel – in the novels of *Egy makró emlékiratai* (1967)/*Memoari jednog makroa* (1970), *A szenvedélyek tanfolyama* (1969), *Áttüntetések* (1984)/*Dupla ekspozíciója* (1983) and in the short stories of *Szitkozódunk, de szemünkből könnyek hullanak* (1969) – the sea is associated with the images of the Pannonian wooden tub and it turns into the fatemetaphor of self-observation and insight, the segment of the anthropological zone which draws the attention to the untenability of absence and the impossibility of escape. Its foamy tiers and terrible storms summon self-recognition and introspection as a prerequisite of being an outlaw. While it offers to be an ideal place for roaming together and dreaming about freedom, its indifferent waves echo the dull tones of sensual bleakness and transitivity of bodies caught in their forced movements from riverbanks to seacoasts. Shining a spotlight on the easily dissolving qualities of regional life brings about the revealing clash of question forms and argument schemes which concern experiencing strangeness and minority outcasts from a personal point of view.

The painter and poet Ferenc Maurits has been depicting the river and the sea in their momentary barrenness, stiffness and occasional grey shades since the end of the 1960s and his visions are definitely related to the textual world of Pál Böndör, whose seaside, karstic poetry focuses on track-tearings and the dual nature of wrecking and dying. The river-archaeology of the prose of Attila Balázs (for example in *Cuniculus* /1979/, *Szemelvények a Féderes Manó emlékirataiból* /1986/, *Ki tanyája ez a világ* /2000/, *A meztelen folyó* /2001/, *Kinek észak, kinek dél* /2008/), and the sea contours and the oceanography of Ottó Fenyvesi's poetry and fine art of (for example in *Ezüstpatkányok áttetsző selyemzónákon* /1978/, *Kollapszus* /1988/, *A káosz angyala* /1993/ – *Andeo haosa* /2009/, *Buzz off!* /1994/, *Amerikai improvizációk* /1999/ – *Američke improvizacije* /2009/, *Blues az óceán felett* /2004/) have utilized the poetic effects of the scenery as memory, the bottom view, the private family mythology and subcultural fragments of historic games for more than three decades.

The ambition of the authors of the *Új Symposion*, namely the marked or unmarked assimilation of the voice of others, can be recognized as a synthesizing process taking shape in diachronic and synchronic parallels and crosstalks. Owning this great variety reflects

the seminal effects of the culture of the mother tongue, knowledge of the surrounding language and international literary trends in equal levels. If we consider Hungarian literature, we can refer, in the first place, to the items of István Tömörkény's legendarium related to the Tisza, the Danube and the Adriatic Sea, to his heroes neglecting the shore (*Tiszai legenda* /1895/, *A Duna lánya* /1895/, *A tengeri város* /1896/ etc.), to Ferenc Herczeg's poetic impressions of the sea (*Szelek szárnyán* /1925/), and Lorand Gaspar's plasmatic use of language, colour and light Lorand Gaspar, as well as the tropical blue and the resonance of the Danube, the Tisza, the Lajta and the Ipoly in the Orphic poetry of Elemér Horváth. In the literary tradition of the Southern Slavs, the Dalmatian setting in the poems of Miroslav Krleža comes to mind (for some reason he was sore at the Mediterranean), his "peacock-rainbow", silver and silky "spider-web sea", the wounded, bloodshot, labouring sea of Miloš Crnjanski, the beloved Makarska, the ebullient azure of Tin Ujević and the threatening, looting, snake-like Tisza of Stevan Raičković. But it is also essential to point out the reception of Herman Melville, Joseph Conrad and Saint-John Perse, since they all regarded the sea as an effort and a challenge of cyclic infinity. The sea as a complex structure, because of its archaic, mythical and cosmic rank, becomes a space-time coordinate of communities and internationalism in which all human relations, proximities and togetherness can acquire different contours.

The organization of space, the formation of the environment and the hybrid archaeology of discovery were interpreted by Ottó Tolnai in the first part of *Delta* (1969), referring to Joseph Conrad, in relation to travelling and the walk of life, while in the unit entitled *Érzékiség gyónásom*, a border theophany, which can be found in *Balkáni babér* (2001)/*Balkanski lovor* (2009), the white whale of Melville's captain Ahab fights the sailor in the only possible way, as its own theologian. According to the deliberations and ponderings in the posthumous writing of Tin Ujević entitled *Javaslat egy önéletrajzi vázlatához* (*Prijedlog za jednu autobiografsku skicu*)²³ "the content of the sea cannot be summarised in a short analysis, the image of the sea is made known to us by (sector) painters and poets".²⁴ The notes of Ottó Tolnai in the blue exercise-book of *Gyökérrágó* (1986) were taken in the same spirit by creating the picture-gallery of honoured Croatian, Serbian and Slovenian painters like Ljubo Ivančić, Juraj Plančić who stayed in Paris for a while, Petar Lubarda, Milan Konjović, Sava Šumanović, Emanuel Vidović, the lover of Venice, Frano Šimunović who refined his skills in Madrid, Zoran Mušič who was familiar with all these places, but he turned up in Vienna, Zurich and even in Dachau and Ivan Tabaković who was born in Arad and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest, and in Munich.

The origo of *Rátka* written by István Domonkos in 1963 is *Éloges* (1960) from Saint-John Perse. His sea "like the sky" whose associative experience-block and intellectual impulse amplify both the negativity and the idyllic transience of the malaise of being on the road. Turning the macrocosm of temporality upside down, creating a montage out of the space-time continuum, the metahistoric organisation of the subsidences of genres and styles all show the strong presence and deep impact of 20th century American literature in the oeuvres of Attila Balázs and Ottó Fenyvesi. First of all, we can refer to the writing methods of Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams, because they all undoubtedly represent, which can be traced to the works

²³ Tin UJEVIĆ, *Tin u izlogu: autobiografski zapisi*, Zagreb 2002., 430–437.

²⁴ Quoted by Vlatko PAVLETIĆ, "Az ujevići költészet kiindulópontjai" in Tin UJEVIĆ, *Szelek játékszere: válogatott versek*, Újvidék 1981., 164.

of the above-mentioned authors, that fragmented, reorganised and reedited relations, connection zones and movement surfaces can never be exploited and held together again in the initial variations and combinations they had been actually formed.

The river, the delta and the sea (both as *mare nostrum* and *mare inferorum*) serve as the patterns of multirooted identity, amalgamation and (con)fusion, they codify, separate, pervade and dissolve things at the same time. The emanation of maritime iconography, the multidimensional consensus of multilingualism, regional articulation and hierarchy and the enactment of tradition is a kind of super-syncretism of whose items, signs and sign-like or barely sign-like, intermixed connections are embedded into the differentiating systems and exchange processes of culture, into the intersections and junctions of texts. The striking peculiarity of the analysed writing practices is that the subject, the actual subject of speaking likes to disappear under the surface of rivers, deltas and seas where the memory traces of a writing activity wave and lay on each other, but these traces neither identify the one “whose name was writ in water”, nor the initiator or the performer of this activity.

The imaginary gate of Vojvodina, which can be opened either from the inside or the outside, standing at the meeting point of cultures, encompasses quarters and civilisations, does not serve separation, but the continuity of exchange processes.

There were times when there was a free-flowing exchange between Central Europe, the Balkans and the Mediterranean on the spiritual, intellectual and emotional terrains of the individual as well as in Hungarian and non-Hungarian *Symposion*-type periodicals and in Yugoslavian projects. Other eras did or do not promote the dignity of otherness and the values of versatility.²⁵

In the works of the authors of the *Új Symposium* that were analyzed, the Mediterranean becomes the membrane, the historical and cultural swivel or hinge of this pervious structure. With the help of this structure linguistic, cultural, historic and religious self-perception can move beyond the frames of provincial seclusion and short-sighted historicism. The river, the delta and the sea are unfailing depositories of meditation and memory forms, they can distract the narrative from the path of fixed points and reduced meanings. They are both bodies of water and combinations of territories which do not cease to unveil and mock the system of areal privileges and cultural stereotypes. The common feature of the Mediterranean, if there is such a thing, is a hidden, critical unity in which the sea is the cradle of dissolutions, spreadings and untamed undercurrents. In that sense it reveals the vulnerability and fragile nature of inherited forms and tropes.²⁶

In the artistic ambitions of the above mentioned authors the question of nativity is closely interlinked with the problems of citizenship, based on residence or free choice, here and there, at home and travelling and wandering, with Orphic tendencies and with the positions of the pimp, the guerilla, the jocular, the jongleur, the roaming musician, the Yugo-Sindbad, the artist-hooligan and the rocker. Worthy authors

(...) are prevented from stiffening, which is a feature of small cultural communities, and the exaggerations of the cultural self-evaluation of provinces by the ability of inner transformation.²⁷

²⁵ B. THOMKA, “Egy Tolnai-metafora visszavezetése”, 11–12.

²⁶ Iain CHAMBERS, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity*, Durham – London 2008., 147–149.

²⁷ B. THOMKA “Egy Tolnai-metafora visszavezetése”, 12.

So it cannot be just a matter of luck that several works of the above-mentioned authors are known and renowned in different languages. The structure of cultural and regional identity built on different but equal values makes their affinity remarkable, which, in the case of Ottó Tolnai, was called by Beáta Thomka a complex artistic attitude based on a poetic dialect and a sensitivity towards local, specific and marginal phenomena and ways of seeing and speaking.²⁸ Let us quote the fundamental, still relevant thoughts of Danilo Kiš, from 1984, on how to look at and use language: “Veruj da je jezik na kojem pišeš najbolji od svih jezika, jer ti drugog nemaš” – “Believe that the language you use for writing is the best of all, because that is all you have” and “Veruj da je jezik na kojem pišeš najgori od svih, mada ga ne bi zamenio ni za jedan drugi” – “Believe that the language you use for writing is the worst of all, although you would never get rid of it for the sake of another one” (*Saveti mladom piscu*, /1984/). These two remonstrances define the versatile artistic activity of Ottó Tolnai, István Domonkos, Katalin Ladik, László Végel, Ferenc Maurits, Pál Böndör, Attila Balázs and Ottó Fenyvesi and their awareness on both the history and theory of art. All of them have either become prominent artists or theorists, critics and essayists throughout the past decades. What they may seem to agree on is arguing or disapproving the possibility of making a distinction between form and non-form. For them form is so non-formal that it almost slips into the sphere of the informal. They consider the formal a certain set or semantic core of structure types which shows itself from time to time by using a historic scaffolding. The structure of the river, the delta and the sea is a formal structure of water levels, a gathering pool which incorporates, creates and maintains connections, mixes and carries different qualities, flows, increases its own water movements by regulating its own inner order.

The real virtue and the result of the inspirational sensuality, sensibility, critical attitude, stylistically intensive editorial professionalism of Ottó Tolnai, who also achieved something remarkable as the last president of the Yugoslav Writers' Association, is that the formers and contributors of theoretical up-to-dateness, artistic demands and vivid literary life could all submerge, due to the conceptualism, land art, space-colour-form installations and environment statuary of the linguistic-cultural river control initiated by the *Symposion*, and find home, for a shorter or longer period of time, in the once real, as the Pannonian Sea, but now only virtual *Symposion*-delta.

²⁸ *Isto*, 12.



VODENI SVJETOVI: ALUZIJE I ILUZIJE (TROPI RIJEKE, DELTE I MORA U PJESNIŠTVU I PROZI KNJIŽEVNOG ČASOPISA *ÚJ SYMPOSION*)

Ključna je ideja ovog članka da nepatvorenost izraza i poetskih metoda nekih književnika potječe iz prepoznavnja mediteranske likvidnosti odnosno različitosti i raznolikosti prirode obilježene stalnom semantičkom dogradnjom. Zahvaljujući mediteranskoj jezičnoj, kulturnoj, povijesnoj i vjerskoj autopercepciji, obrađeni autori daleko prelaze okvire provincijskih ograničenja i kratkovidnog historicizma. Rijeka, položaj delte i more neiscrpni su prijenosnici meditacija i struktura memorije. Oni skreću narative sa staza konačnih interpretacija i čvrstih intersekcija. Kao bogatstvo vode i kombinacija teritorija oni ne prestaju osuđivati i ismijavati sustav povlastica i kulturne predrasude. Umjetnici Ottó Tolnai, István Domonkos, Katalin Ladik, László Végel, Ferenc Maurits, Pál Bördör, Attila Balázs i Ottó Fenyvesi čvrsto ukorjenjuju pitanje identita u problem rođenja, putovanja i seobe, makroa, gerilca, šaljivca, putujućeg glazbenika, jugoslavenskog Sindbada, umjetnika kao huligana i rokera. Njihov kulturni i regionalni identitet, koji se sastoji iz nekoliko podjednako nužnih sastojaka, uvijek je favorizirao vrstu sklonosti koju se može opisati kao složeni artistski izraz. Taj je izraz djelatan kao poetski dijalog, naklonost spram lokalnih, marginalnih i specifičnih pojava ili kao senzibilitet za marginalne putove govorenja, gledanja i bivanja.

Ključne riječi: položaj delte, poimanje mora, transhumana simbioza, manjinska književnost, Vojvodina, južnoslavenska književna scena, višekorijenski identitet



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