

Thesis of the Dissertation

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The Saint's Day and the Pilgrimage as Ritual Drama

Budapest, 2007

Topic, the appointed tasks, methods

At the beginning of my research work, I had the aim of observing the Roman Catholic pilgrimage and the Serbian orthodox *slava* from the aspect of their staging. Hereby, I wanted to present those motivations and details of the pilgrimage and the saint's day, which had been in the background in the previous researches. I presumed that these communal festivities, having several hundreds and thousands of participants can be considered *ritual dramas*. This term means, that the participation in the festivity can be compared to a drama, with one exception: in our case, the believers are not passive onlookers, but take part actively in the events. They can attend the events, serving the basis of the holiday, namely, Christ's Stations of the Cross; parallel they can be parts of a community, in which the feeling of *communitas* can be achieved, either from national or from religious aspect.

I had the aim of reaching the individual motivations and the depth of the soul. I emphasised the analysis of the interaction between the individual and the community; the examination of how the individual can dissolve in the community and in meeting the Saint; how the individual problems become catharsis and release through the communal rituals.

The analysis is mainly based on fieldwork, carried out from the year 1996, during which I myself took part in different pilgrimages and wakes: a pilgrimage is a complex event, going on at several places at a time; that is why it is difficult to examine it alone. I tried to solve this problem by joining smaller communities several times, observing their habits, attitude, and symbolic actions; and making interviews at the same time. This work was complemented by photo documentation and diaries, containing the research.

In Máriaradna, I had the possibility to observe the pilgrimage in the years 1996 and 1997 on the 15th of August, on the feast of the assumption. Between 2003 and 2005 I took part on the pilgrimage on the 8th of September; twice I joined the groups of believers from Csermő (County Arad), once I joined the inhabitants from Palota (County Bihar). To Csíksomlyó, I went together with the pilgrims from Gyimes, on foot, nine times. About the pilgrimage of Csíksomlyó, several essays have been written in the last few years. Nevertheless, I decided to carry out my own research, because I did not want to reconstruct the past, but I wanted to see, how the people present – both from Gyimes and from Hungary – live through the feast, festive time, which is a peculiar mixture of past, present and future. To the Serbian orthodox Saint's Day of Grábóc I first went in the year 2001 together with the believers from Szeged, and then in 2003 together with András Simon, we made film documentation about the events. This helped a lot in my larger work, because I could observe the events following each other very quickly in more details. In 2003 I took part in the Saint's Day with the believers from Medina, in 2005 with the believers from Szentendre and Budakalász. Grábóc necessitated a different attitude from my part as

a researcher, compared to Roman Catholic shrines, as I do not belong to the Serbian orthodox community.

The repeated participations in the pilgrimages made it possible for me in the later years to understand and get to know the deeper layers of motivation concerning human attitudes, as the main events of the festivities were already known from previous experience. That is why I could concentrate on not just the smaller details but the changes as well. (For the pilgrimage differs year by year in a sense.) I could also enlarge the group of people questioned. During my research work, I paid attention to the fact, that those interviewed should be from different layers of the pilgrims: women and men, old and young, in the case of Csíksomlyó people from Gyimes and people from Hungary, in the case of Grábóc, Hungarians and Croatians also.

The works of Sándor Bálint, Zsuzsanna Erdélyi, János Hetény, László Székely, Vilmos Tánczos and Aurél Vajkai helped my work greatly. They are the ones, who paid special attention to the 'transfiguration of the soul', namely, the processes, going on in the soul of the participants. Among the foreign authors, I emphasise Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, who interpreted the pilgrimage from the point of view of the drama.

The structure of the dissertation

In the first half of my dissertation, I surveyed the notions, serving the basis of my research. Namely, pilgrimage is a *festivity*, during which the believers can meet the *Saint*, after being lifted from the *profane* world. I also delineated the meaning of *drama*, *theatrum sacrum*, and *cultural performance*: although these expressions are used in different sciences and they are characteristic in a certain period, they have the same content as the *ritual drama*, the notion, used in this dissertation. I find it important, that the confession, the confession of sins and the absolution, the physical pain of penance contribute to the purgation of the soul, i.e. to healing. This is proved by examples, experienced in the examined sites: pilgrimage on foot, the completion of the Stations of the Cross, or sleeping in the church.

I explained in details the connection (being several thousand years old) between religious rites and theatre: drama and theatre developed from religious rites in the Palaeolithic and ancient cultures, and in medieval Europe too. From my point of view, those school dramas, religious processions and Stations of the Cross are also important, which meant theatre for many people in the Hungary of the 16-18th century. Concerning the professional theatre (Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, Richard Schechner), efforts were made in the 20th century, which wanted to make the theatre a rite, substituting the religion, so that the events could change those present. Instead of given text, the gestures and silence became important, the dissolving of stage and auditorium started.

The pilgrimages are different from these efforts, concerning the facts that they are based on religion; for the participants, the life of Christ is a reality, which is enlivened during the festivity; and the believers can identify with this reality during the Stations of the Cross. The pilgrimage is determined by the presence of Christ, whilst during the theatre performance, the audience is only confronted with the life of the performers.

In my dissertation, I unfolded the particular characteristics of ritual drama in details in three case studies. From these, Máriaradna represented the 'international' pilgrimages, with several nationalities as participants: the most significant shrine of the Bánság territory is visited by Hungarians, Germans, Bulgarians, Slovaks, Romanians and Crassovans. With the help of the example of Máriaradna, based on the research of early 20th-century written documents, I explained the traditional form of pilgrimage, touching upon the issue of *pilgrimage christening*, as an initiation rite. I also wrote about the fact, that the one-time participants of the *szögedi nation* could not take part in the pilgrimage due to the change of borders and organised the pilgrimage of Radna in Szeged, between the years 1924 and 1942. On the pilgrimages, going on nowadays, organised on the 8th of September, there are lots of similarities among the different nationalities concerning ritual drama. However, the Bulgarians and Crassovans had a more spectacular festivity due to their number and level of organisation.

In the last 15 years, Csíksomlyó has become one of the most visited pilgrimages of the Carpathian Basin; several hundred thousand people take part in the Pentecost festivity. From them, I examined the people from Gyimes and the participants, arriving from Hungary, joining the former group. Among the participants, several dramaturgies exist: depending on the age group, condition of health, or the place of origin. (This latter indicates that the possibilities of Hungarians are different from those Hungarians, living in Romania, Gyimes.) The different scripts express the transformed meanings of pilgrimage. While for the old from Gyimes, the festivity is important because of its religious content, the young people treat it as a time for entertainment, an ideal option for meeting others. Lot of people from the Hungarians would like to express and relive their sense of being a Hungarian. I also touched upon the issue of the expectations those Hungarians have, who would like to 'draw on' the cleanness of the Gyimes people. They do not want to identify primarily with the pain of Jesus Christ or the Blessed Virgin, but with the world of the Gyimes people, because they find this existence perfect – which is an illusion in reality. I wrote about the costumes and the tools of visual culture, as they had an important role in perpetuating and popularizing the ritual drama.

In the case of the orthodox religion, the motivation for the Saint's Day (*slava*) is different from that of the Catholic pilgrimage; contrary to the Catholic *indulgentia* doctrine, it is rather motivated by the respect for pictures. Nevertheless, the line of activities, the ritual drama runs according to a similar script, so the frame of interpretation can be generalised both for Eastern and Western Catholicism.

While Csíkсомlyó is the sacred centre for the Hungarians living in Romania, Grábóc is that of the Serbian orthodox people, living in Hungary. The significance of the monastery, founded in 1585 is the fact, that this is the only Serbian orthodox monastery in Hungary, its monks worked in several counties during the centuries. Nowadays, there are no Serbians in the district, the monastery functions as a tourist attraction in most part of the year for the visitors, but on the 12th of July (which is the Day of Peter and Paul according to the Julian calendar) people arrive from all parts of the country and from Croatia and Serbia too: the relatives and friends living far away can maintain their relationship this way, young people can get acquainted. On one day of the year, the Serbian Community also possesses the space ritually. This way, they can keep the sacred place in their memories alive and can show their presence to the inhabitants of the place. The grandeur of the Orthodox Church, the dynamics of the liturgy and the varied gestures affect the senses dramatically, so they also influence those who cannot understand the language of the liturgy.

The results of the research

The central place of the ritual drama is a saint site, where everyday time disappears. The emphasis lies on the connection with the heavenly, the believers undertake suffer. The ritual drama begins right at home, when preparing for the pilgrimage and also includes the processes after the performance. Hereby, not only the shrine, but the wider surroundings, even the dwelling place of the performers become the locale of the ritual drama: the believers set off towards the sacred place from the four directions at the same time.

As the pilgrimage is repeated year by year (in an optimal case) there is a permanent structure of it, evolving through the years, but a little difference can always be found, following the current circumstances. That is why there is no uniformity, we can talk about variations. The script of the pilgrimage is partly fixed in a written form; one type of the sources are the hymn-books, which, apart from the hymns, include the welcome and farewell prayers, the texts during the Stations of the Cross, and often the protocol of the given shrine. The oral part of the script lives in the people, organising the communities, they inherit the knowledge from the previous generations and transmit it to the following generations.

The people, arriving to the pilgrimage are organised into groups. These groups have their own organisers, who lead the singing or supervise the believers: where they are standing in the procession. Besides, there are main roles, such as the role of the persons, who carry the crucifix, symbolising Jesus Christ or the flags. On the road, the participants communicate with God and their heavenly mother through prayers and songs. Most of the pilgrims form an organic audience: they take part in the ritual drama due to spiritual necessity, not pleasure. For the realisation of the drama they are needed. At the shrine all of the people present are participants, only

the main roles change. There are persons, who have a more active part to play at certain times: for example those, who organise and lead the groups, have a more significant role in their community, but during the masses they behave like other persons in their group. Through photographs and television commentaries every participant becomes the part of a greater spectacle, intended to a wider audience.

During the pilgrimage, the dramatic quality is increased by visual and music effects, the believers express their love and respect for God and the Blessed Virgin with songs. Although certain periods of the pilgrimage (mass, songs, prayers) have a fixed text, the visual and acoustic elements like music, movement and vision must be considered equivalent with the texts, and they are also in the limelight. The setting does not mean just the sacred edifices, but the natural surrounding too. The music and the silence, the movement and the visual experience organically contribute to the transformation, going on in the believers.

This ritual drama makes it possible to express the repressed feelings: the believers express their anxiety and tension with song, movement, prayer, or during the confession to the priest and through him, to God; during the vigil, to the Blessed Virgin. In these cases, catharsis is often characterised by screaming, crying, kneeling, or situating themselves close to the icon or the statue of the shrine. These activities help healing.

During the pilgrimage the believers sense the presence of God with all their senses. Concerning seeing, the aesthetic quality of the shrine, tuning the people to piety is very important: the churches of great size and other sacred monuments, the highly decorated interiors hold the audience spellbound, as they are much more grandeur than most of the rural churches. The believers can feel the sky opening when they enter the church and they can become part of the heavenly existence, where they can worship the source and final objective of their life. There are examples for light-experiences: candles bear importance in all the three shrines: in Grábóc, stepping inside the church, people lit a candle for the living and the dead, in Radna, candles burn in front of the crucifixes of the hill, the Blessed Virgin and other statues; in Csíksomlyó, the performance of the Station of the Cross at dawn and the sunrise symbolise the coming of light, i.e. God.

In Máriaradna, visual quality is also constituted by the votive pictures, offers and marble boards, testifying the mediation of the Blessed Virgin. The grace, won at the shrine is expanded to the pilgrims' home with the sacred objects, sacred water and green branches. The green branches, brought home from Máriaradna and Csíksomlyó are used in case of storm, for they are thrown into the fire; the special *Tear of Maria* (a plant) in Máriaradna or the basil of Grábóc are used for healing. The pilgrims make the humbleness for God visible; they give evidence of Christ for the spectators and for themselves. The pilgrimage on foot is a self-disciplinary, self-strengthening act, so that the pilgrim could become the controller of his or her own body, and could concentrate on the encounter with the Saint. With the photos, taken in Máriaradna, I pointed out, how the posture of the body and the gestures express the mental state of the believer.

Besides seeing, touching is also important, as the participants can share in the Saint this way. The rite of the respect and the reception of the Saint is the touching of the crucifixes, altars, the statue of the shrine, or its copy. To this latter, a custom is attached: the object, (handkerchiefs, clothes) touching the object is later used for healing. Kisses have the same role: in Máriaradna, the main altar is kissed, while in Gyimesbükk, the crucifix is kissed with Christ's body on it, travelling to and from the shrine of Csíksomlyó, in Grábóc, the icons in the church are kissed. Through the example of the people from Palota the role of the sacred water is explained: in their home, it means an everyday purification and strengthens the presence and protection of God.

The power of singing, its soul-opening effect is mentioned at several points. The text of the songs intensifies the feeling that they are not alone with their problems. Silence – even if it is created only in the soul, as there is not much possibility to remain alone in the shrines – is appropriate for an inner examination of the soul, for the creation of a closer contact with the heavenly, when the noisy outside world ceases to exist. The best example for demonstrating the power of the uttered word is the confession, when the believers confess their sins to God.

Communion is connected to this act; during communion the believers share in the body and blood of Christ. Concerning the sense of taste, we must mention the fasting, namely the non-tasting, which makes communion much more emphatic. Tasting includes the fact, that here on Earth, being together is partial, temporary, and can become final only at the end of the earthly pilgrimage. The *Tear of Maria* plant of Máriaradna, which gets its healing power from the circumstances – namely, that it is collected in the sacred time next to the Stations of the Cross – , must be eaten to have the effect. The most natural example for smelling is the use of incense during the orthodox liturgy; here the incense stands for respect and sacredness.

Pilgrimage is not seen uniformly by the pilgrims. This depends on their religiousness, age, social rank, and the motivations, which made the pilgrims begin the pilgrimage. The depth of religiousness, the confrontation with death and life depend on the age as well; this fact is analysed in the case of Csíksomlyó.

At the end of my work I have the feeling, that the chosen conceptual framework could be used: it helped to find new connections in the analysis of pilgrimage and I could depict a more detailed picture about the participants, passing through the festivity. I managed to grab the elements of identification and transformation. I made certain, that most of the people, taking part in the ritual drama, – namely those, who participate because of their religious feelings – live through the encounter with the Saint, which makes purification and catharsis possible. The identification with the story of Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin moves the feelings, releases the tension and contributes to a deeper understanding of the self. The pilgrimage, in a traditional sense is not efficiency-centred, but a form of taking part in Christ's suffering, when the believer confides him or herself to God on the basis of love and trust. At the same time, the form of the traditional festivity is just a frame. In these cases,

shrines have a new role; they express the belonging to a certain nationality, or the escape from the dangers of globalization to an ideal, but nowadays broken world.

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Szeged, 2003. V. 10-X. 10.