POETIC, AESTHETIC, ETHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF WITNESS IN THE HUNGARIAN LITERATURE OF THE HOLOCAUST
Text and Memory in the Works of the First and the Successive Generations, from János Pilinszky to Szilárd Borbély

PHD THESIS ABSTRACT

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The main concern of my research is the representation of witness in the most important texts of the Hungarian literature of the Holocaust – how the poetics of memory takes shape in literary texts, how it develops from generation to generation, and how it reflects upon its own traditions. It became clear during the research that these fundamentally poetic and aesthetic questions have ethical and theological aspects as well. This is why I deal with the following literary works on these four theoretical planes: from the witnessing generation I read the essays and poems of János Pilinszky, and Imre Kertész’s novel, *Fatelessness*, together with two closely related texts that can be considered as “parables about sin”, *World Citizen and Pilgrim* and the inserted stories of Kertész’s *Fiasco*; and from the successive generation I read Péter Nádas’s *The End of a Family Saga*, László Márton’s *Shadowy High Street*, and Szilárd Borbély’s *Pompes Funèbres*.

My dissertation is divided into two major parts, according to the authors’ generations. This approach is very characteristic of the contemporary American research of Holocaust-representation, which emphasizes the mediated nature of the literary works by the second and third generations as opposed to the immediate experience-centred texts of the witnessing generation. This distinction however does not fully apply to the Hungarian literary works I have chosen for my research, although together with the growing temporal distance we can see that the poetics of remembrance also changes.

The interdisciplinary bibliography I refer to represents the complexity of the context of Holocaust-remembrance.

The aesthetics of Holocaust-representation is based on Adorno’s work. Since I focus on the rhetorics of the texts, I study closely Adorno’s „prohibition of the image” which indeed is the core of the artistic witness of the Holocaust, and it deals with the relationship between memory, representation and figuration.

In order to comprehend more deeply the hermeneutics of witness, I consult the works of Ricoeur and Lévinas.

Paul Celan’s *Tenebrae*, a fundamentally important text of late modernist poetry, addresses the most vital issues of Jewish-Christian theological tradition. Despite many of its critics, I do not ask whether this poem is “blasphemous”. By provoking and re-interpreting basic notions of Jewish-Christian tradition, it reveals post-Holocaust theology’s urgent need of renewal. I sum up the most important trends of post-Holocaust theology – and the consequences of this survey will prove vitally important for the whole of my research.

The works of Derrida define the course of the dissertation, mainly because Derrida always derives the ethical reference of the text from its rhetorical aspects. This is why I find his *Shibboleth* so essential when interpreting *Tenebrae*, and this is why I consult his *Faith and Knowledge* when I examine...
the relationship between religious and lyrical discourse in Pilinszky. These works by Derrida, together with *Who is the Mother?*, *Mémoires for Paul de Man* and *Rams* – which I refer to in later chapters – talk about the inherently mediated nature of witness and mourning.

In order to give a clear idea of the rhetorical processes within Holocaust-remembrance, I use Ricoeur’s concept of the *model* to demonstrate how the name *Auschwitz* turns into a metaphor; and I also use Paul de Man’s and Walter Benjamin’s understanding of the *allegory*, which is especially relevant in relation to Szilárd Borbély’s book.

It appears to have become the consensus of Hungarian literary criticism concerning Imre Kertész’s *Fatelessness*, that one of the major themes of the novel is the resistance to narratives that shape one’s identity, one’s fate. That is why works on narrative historiography and narrative psychology must be part of the bibliography. However, in my reading, the novel challenges morality on a more essential level. When understanding the relationship between ethics and narrative identity, I use László Tengelyi’s works: *Sin as the event of fate* and *Life story and event of fate*.

The American trend of examining how the successive generations represent the Holocaust is an important unit within the bibliography of my research. It is an approach that is extensively focused on biographical experience and the notion of trauma. I handle it with reservations, because it often considers general phenomena specific to a certain generation. As, for example, the mediated nature of remembrance, or memory’s dependence on images is *not* exclusively characteristic of the second or third generation, but of witness itself. Marianne Hirsch’s widely used term, *postmemory*, is very interesting from this point of view, because its aim is to describe how the memory of the second generation is formed, but Hirsch herself speaks about the wider references of her term. Michael Rothberg’s, James E. Young’s, Lisa Saltzman’s and Dora Apel’s works inspired my research. I also found the observations re-evaluating the relationship of mourning and melancholia most valuable, because they establish a link between the openness of signification and the unfinished nature of grieving. There is considerable reference to Kristeva in this aspect – I also use Derrida’s thoughts on mourning as part of the argument.

Holocaust-representation by the artists of the successive generations is often described as „picturesque”, as opposed to the demand of non-figurativeness of Adorno’s *Bildverbot*. Undoubtedly, the growing temporal distance means that images of memory, and representations become more important as primary experience proves unaccessible; and we find more and more references to photographs in literary texts. When understanding these phenomena, I use Sontag’s observations about the relationship between ethics and the pictures of „the pain of others”; and also Barthes’s thoughts on representation and photography.
When selecting the biography of literary criticism with regard to the literary texts I examined, I chose the ones that either sum up critical understanding of the given text, or that which contributed significantly to that understanding.

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS OF THE DISSERTATION

Part I: Text and Memory in the Works of the Witnessing Generation

1. The Aesthetics and Poetics of Witness

1.1. Negative Aesthetics
Adorno’s aesthetics considers the event of the Holocaust as an existential foundational event, that is why it has very significant ethical aspects. First, I refer to Jauß’s essay, in which he compares negative aesthetics to the French “metaphysics of rupture”. The difference between the two concepts lies in the understanding of the social relevance of the work of art. According to Adorno, works of art carry out negation, and thus, through a specific relationship with reality, they gain their existential importance.

I give a detailed interpretation of Adorno’s Commitment, in which he explains his famous sentence, and unfolds this tense sequence of tropes: „to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric”. Twelve years after Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft, Adorno speaks about the onthological paradox of the necessary and impossible work of art; and he prescribes a language for it, that can resist „barbaric”, totalising effects. Art is seen as necessary, because no other discourse is able to perform this resistance – this is how suffering can find its own voice.

1.2. Bildverbot – Prohibition of the Image
Adorno’s Bildverbot or „prohibition of the image” is a prescription that is rooted in the ethical aspect of Holocaust-representation, but it focuses on the functioning of language in artistic texts. What it prohibits is the figurative duplication of reality by the tropes of literary language. The aim is to preserve the past event’s uniqueness in memory, and not to replace it by tropes of similarity or repetition.

In Negative Dialectics the concept of the prohibition of the image has strong theological connotations – one might say, theological discourse penetrates here into the language of aesthetics. What these concepts have in common is the prohibition of representing and producing utopia. But, according
to Adorno, total negation can open up a possibility for hope’s utopia through addressing reality and saying no to it.

After all, we must see that the metaphorization of the Holocaust is unstoppable – as Michael Rothberg has pointed out, even Adorno uses the name Auschwitz in a special metaphorical sense, as a model (according to Ricoeur’s use of this notion).

1.3. Witnessing the Absolute, the Infinite

I consult Ricoeur’s works in order to gain a better understanding of the hermeneutics of witness. According to Ricoeur, the meaning of witness can only be derived from the context of „original affirmation” that is completely independent from experience. If so, it is no wonder that theological discourse radiates into the aesthetics of witness.

Ricoeur makes some valuable statements about witnessing: it requires commitment on the behalf of the testifier, because of the gaps within the sequence of signs produced by the process of witnessing.

Ricoeur’s concept is rooted in Lévinas’s views on the primary, ethical witness; but Lévinas is more radical when he speaks about the paradox of witness and faith being interrelated. This shows us, how essentially witnessing is unseparable from its ethical context.

We can finally draw some conclusions concerning late modernist poetry’s representation of the Holocaust: 1. The subject of the testimony (that is, the Holocaust) is compelling, but it cannot speak for itself, since it is outside of language. 2. In spite of that, the lyrical text can represent traces of the existence of the testified. Since we are talking about the memory of suffering, it can be said that only wounded language is able to bear witness. 3. If testimony is carried out in the process of reception, than the recipient him/herself will stand in the position of the witnessing one.

1.4. Derrida: Shibboleth

In his essay on Celan, Derrida speaks about the relationship between remembrance and wounded language. The moment of time designated by the date is inseparable from the poem, but the promise of the date (that is, of recollecting the event’s unicality thoroughly) is not being fulfilled, says Derrida. This is how the hidden date of Celan’s poems speaks to us as the wound of remembrance. But the hiding subject of memory still can leave its trace through the enigma of the date in the text.

1.5. Paul Celan: Meridian

My reading of Celan’s Meridian is related to the concept of utopia in Negative Dialectics, and to Derrida’ statements about memory in Shibboleth. I highlight Celan thoughts on intersubjectivity. According to him, the poems put the establishment of the self into an utopian distance, and they say the same about
the coming to existence of Thou. If we accompany the poem in the circular course it offers, we can regain ourselves as a different self. The Meridian’s chain of thought will be a very important point of reference when dealing with the aesthetic writings of János Pilinszky.

1.6. Paul Celan: Tenebrae
Paul Celan’s Tenebrae is a deeply paradoxical text. By provoking and re-interpreting basic notions of Jewish-Christian tradition, it reveals post-Holocaust theology’s urgent need of renewal – since after the Holocaust our theodctic concepts have to be re-shaped and re-considered. I point out that Gadamer’s Károly Vajda’s and Magdolna Orosz’s reading of the poem applies to it a theological tradition basically unchanged by the Holocaust, while Noémi Kiss speaks about the complete and final deconstruction of faith in the poem. I consider Tenebrae the poetic challenge of theodicy, in this respect. It is related to a type of discourse that has several traditions, and it is rooted in the arguing voice in the Old Testament. Using Zachary Braiterman’s and Steven T. Katz’s comprehensive works, I sum up the shift of Jewish theology’s focus in the oeuvre of its major thinkers: Richard Rubenstein, Ignaz Maybaum, Eliezer Berkovits, Lévinas, Hans Jonas, Emil Fackenheim. The most important changes are: doubt of providence and of the covenantal relationship, re-evaluation of the function of prayer, renunciation of the concept of reparation. We also find concepts about the hiding”, „withdrawing” or „weak” God. The same shift takes place in post-Holocaust Christian theology – I represent it through the ideas of Jürgen Moltmann and Dorothee Sölle. Their works stress the community of the suffering ones in and with Jesus.

Together with the idea of the weakening God the concept of man’s infinite responsibility emerges, which is understood as the only means of preventing another Holocaust to happen. Tenebrae questions this concept, though it speaks most radically about God’s „dependence” on man. This poem is able to speak about (or speak to) God in a way that it contains the experience of suffering on the one hand, and it does not blend into theleological horizon on the other.

2. Witnessing in the Works of János Pilinszky

2.1. János Pilinszky’s „Evangelical Aesthetics”
The focus of János Pilinszky’s aesthetics – similarly to that of Celan – is on the intersubjective relationship. But according to Celan’s Meridian, the poem does not represent the fulfillment of this relationship, only its hope; whereas the poems of Pilinszky sometimes seem to guarantee the accomplishment of the encounter of I and Thou.
Pilinszky’s aesthetic concepts are based on values that lie outside of aesthetics – this is why he calls it „evangelical”. After having a look at its basic notions I point out that 1. according to Pilinszky, the work of art as testimony is a special medium which receives its content from the testifying potential of the Word; 2. and it tries to be realized as communication in the process of reception.

2.2. János Pilinszky’s Works and the Discourse of Religion

According to Adorno, a work of art has to create the representation of the Holocaust without letting it to be swallowed up by the figurative language of totalizing discourse. As a point of reference, this leads us to two important questions of the reception of Pilinszky’s oeuvre: 1. Does linguistic awareness appear in his works, and, in this respect, what is the relationship between the discourse of his essays and poems? 2. Are the signs in the texts in any way influenced, fixed by religious discourse?

When thinking these questions over, we get a lot of help from Derrida’s *Faith and Knowledge*, in which one of the basic statements is that as soon as the language of faith turns into the discourse of religion, it will contain a „legal” element that guarantees the verity of what has been said. The existence of the subject of witness depends on the speech act. It means that the rhetorics of the sentences that state the priority of God goes the opposite direction as their content. Rhetorics precedes theology and theological aesthetics. The shift from the poetic to the legal-testifying discourse can be found in many of Pilinszky’s poems. One of the outcomes of this research is that uncritical association of the essays and the poems will further restrain the scope of the interpretation of Pilinszky’s lyrical texts.

2.3. The Memory of the Holocaust in Pilinszky’s Essays and in Political Theology

We find reference to the Holocaust mainly in Pilinszky’s essays on aesthetics, in the context of writing and responsibility. Pilinszky places the Holocaust among foundational events that are part of religious memory (and not of historical memory). Thus Holocaust gains theological meaning and importance: it designates the “scandal”, the total nadir, and it steps into a mutual interpretative relation with the Passion.

In Pilinszky’s thinking, the past challenges the present. This idea appears in his essay, *From the Diary of a Poet* (1965), in which he speaks about his visit to Auschwitz, and meeting with the photograph which later accompanied the whole of his life and work. Through the recollection of this photograph he points out that it is temporal disconnection that stimulates the work of art to address the past and to aim at the reparation of it by connecting past with the hope of the future. Such concept can only emerge in an approach that is able to combine eschatological trust with apocalyptic hope.
We find a similar account on memory in the post-Holocaust theological trend called the „political theology” (see J. B. Metz). Metz is strongly influenced by Adorno, and he considers the Holocaust as an essential part of theological discourse. According to political theology, the act of faith is remembrance and re-telling.

2.4. Debates in the Reception of Pilinszky’s Poetry: Allegorical and Metaphorical Processes

Noémi Kiss considers the poetry of Pilinszky „easily allegorizable”. We undoubtedly find such phenomena in his works. However, these are combined with a special textual occurrence of „empty spaces” (see György Eisemann essay). I also dispute the frequently used term of „impersonality”, because I think it fails to represent the inner dynamics of the figure I in Pilinszky’s poems.

Another important debate concerns the relationship between the Passion and the Holocaust in Pilinszky’s poetry – whether it can be considered as metaphorical or metonymical (see Marcell Mártonffy and György Vári). I point out that there cannot be a global answer that would apply to the whole of the oeuvre. As we examine the formation of Holocaust-representation in Pilinszky’s works, together with the changing understanding of sin and suffering, we witness the changing function and intensity of metaphorical relations. In earlier works we see that the texts are looking for “valid” ways for representing the Holocaust. Later, the trope Auschwitz is used to designate the total realization of existential suffering, and it will take part in metaphorical processes.

In the remaining part of this section I examine Pilinszky’s oeuvre according to the occurrence of the words convict, prisoner, captive – a group of tropes that is an essential element of his Holocaust-poems, but it is also important in his pre-war poetry, and in the later works it demonstrates the shifting focus of Pilinszky’s interest. Reading according to keywords is inspired by Péter Balassa.

2.5. János Pilinszky: Trapeze and Bar

In this early volume the trope convict designates the original sinfulness of existence, and also the defencelessness towards the repressed. This figure of speech appears in a divided attitude to human condition – it summarizes it, and it also shows pity towards it. It is the I in the texts that is the central existence and the centre of focus. (I use Zsuzsa Beney’s, Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy’s and Gábor Schein’s observations in my reading.)

2.6. János Pilinszky: On the Third Day

First I give a detailed reading of the poems that precede the poem An Apocryph. I focus on the texts’ understanding of witness. (I use Zoltán Kulcsár Szabó’s, Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy’s and Gábor Schein’s observations.)
The poem *An Apocryph* intensifies the theodicitic problems raised by the Holocaust by questioning the doctrine of „the end of all times”. It also reflects upon the statement of religious discourse which Derrida expresses as „There is no absolute witness without God”. This is why in the God-forsaken world of *An Apocryph* the witnessing voice cannot maintain the chain of signifiers and suffers together with the other beings the turn of the existence into nothing. The final turning point of the text however shows a new possibility for testifying. The witness turns into a sign or writing (into a „pleat”, „dent”). It is very similar to Lévinas’s account of witnessing in which the witness can only be bail for this testimony by his own existence and responsibility.

In the context of the volume, there is tension between *An Apocryph* and the christological attitude of *On the Third Day*, the poem that gave the title of the volume. István Jelenits’s and Péter Balassa’s interpretation tries to smooth away this tension: they link *An Apocryph*’s total forsakenness with the corresponding moment of the Passion. I believe that this narrows down the poem’s provocative scope. I find the whole of the volume not at all homogenous, but containing deep ruptures.

**2.7. János Pilinszky: Big City Icons – Splinters – Dénouement - Crater**

The motif of the captive in the later volumes designates the relationship between sinfulness and existence, but it also relates to the suffering Jesus – therefore the poems also speak about the relatedness of the frail man on Jesus through this connection.

This part of the oeuvre speaks about the value of forgetting through forgiving, instead of the need of constant witnessing.

In the last two poems that mention the photograph about Auschwitz Pilinszky found so essentially important, *Auschwitz* turns into a metaphor and it offers the possibility of identification with the persecuted. This is part of the final important theme of the oeuvre: the relationship between suffering and existence.

**3. The Testimony of Radical Witness**

(Imre Kertész’s *Fatelessness* and the “Parables about Sin”)

**3.1. Major Issues of the Critical Reception of Fatelessness: Narrativity and Metaphorization**

In the last decade it has become evident for Hungarian literary scholarship that it is the language and the irony of Kertész’s *Fatelessness* that reflects on the un-integrable nature of the event of the Holocaust in explanatory discourse. The novel’s complex narrative confronts the established-institutionalized Holocaust-remembrance, it radically separates memory from reparation. It also represents the diagnosis of narrative histoioigraphy, that is: the facts of the past can only be
accessed through our present-day narrative schemes. Narrative psychology shares the same conclusion. (Here I use Róbert Braun’s, H. White’s, Sarbin’s research.) However, I think the question this novel raises is about the inherent contradiction of narrative truth.

I refer to Lawrence L. Langer’s research on the narratives of Holocaust survivors. Langer criticises Charles Taylor, because Taylor considers the coherence of our identity-shaping narratives as a value. If we call these well-formed narratives *fate*, then the Holocaust, as a diagnostic model, leads us towards the withdrawal of well-formedness, that is, towards *fatelessness*.

Resisting narratives of fate and resisting metaphorical influence – this is the conclusion we most often find in critical accounts of the novel (see György Vári or Dávid Kaposi). I think the criticism of morality in Kertész’s novel is far more radical. I use László Tengelyi’s comprehensive works to point out, that while the ethical theory has always dealt with our aim at good, and it presents moral behaviour as systematic, in the world of *Fatelessness* it is evil that is systematic, and during the process of adaptation and fight for survival good deeds are completely surprising. We must note, that the narrating voice of the main character speaks about total adaptation, that is, identification with the aggressor. The idea of the adaptation applies to the perpetrators as well in the novel. And by representing this bilateral adaptation, the text interrupts our moral judgements that attach moral values to certain positions. The concept of moral authonomy proves to be an illusion, which was also a means of mass murder during the Holocaust. Finally, the deconstruction of moral narratives leaves us with a vital problem: what lies behind this surface? In the following, I read the novel according to this question.

### 3.2. *Fatelessness* as Ethical Challenge

In Kertész’s novel Holocaust is a diagnostic model of our self knowledge. In this respect, it represents the responsibility and commitment towards the Other as dependent on the situation (see the journey on the train); it also represents the inferior one’s identification with the aggressor (see the selection), and the sheer physicality of agony and death. It also shows us the arbitrariness that lies beneath our grand explanatory narratives.

*Fatelessness* distinguishes between experience and retrospection – the latter cannot perceive the events as a sequence of time, but it creates a punctiform image of them by the figuration of remembrance. The narrating voice tries to maintain experience – which also contains that disturbing fact that the perpetrators used the participation of the victims. Köves, the main character demands that the individual should be responsible for his/her own time – as fate –, which also means giving up the illusion of innocence.
3.3. Kertész’s „Parables about Sin”
a. World Citizen and Pilgrim. This version of Cain’s story was written at the same time as Fatelessness, and its basic questions are closely related to that of the novel’s. It can be read as a parable of human condition, and as of the Holocaust as well. First it deals with anger, that stems from alienation, separating brotherhood, and it results in killing. The second main theme of the text is the incompatibility of sin with divine providence. Cain is a cynic, he gives two types of answers: either man is authonomus, and there is no God; or he is a tool of God, but then God is the perpetrator. This paradox deconstructs Western theology; but it also hides away the fact that to link sin with freedom is not only an error, but it is a lie. Cain wasn’t free, when he killed his brother, but he could not handle his angry temper and hatred. We see how Cain’s concept of sin refuses to contain the reality if the crime, and to take responsibility for it. Sin loses its consequences.

b. „I, the Hangman...”. This story within the novel The Fiasco is a fictitious monologue that carries on with the ethical criticism of Fatelessness. According to it, the figure of the hangman gives the society the opportunity to make moral judgments and thus to separate themselves from the reality of sin. „Demonizing” the hangman „purges” the collective from evil; and it serves as the base for moral order. This story is the fictitious mirror-image of the Eichmann-trial. It reflects upon those moral dilemma that Hannah Arendt writes about in her book, Eichmann in Jerusalem.

3.4. Conclusions of Reading Kertész’s Works
These three texts together deny both identity as existential choice, and moral authonomy, and they also deny irresponsibility as well. But they speak about sin, since their main concern is hatred, killing. There is determination in Kertész’s works (that is: adaptation, anger are superior to moral authonomy), but there is no fateful (because each moment contains an infinite set of possibilities, according to Fatelessness). This concept contradicts traditional oppositions, and combines contrasting ideas. The tradition of ethics is being deconstructed here, step by step. As Kenneth Seeskin points out: the Holocaust is not unique because its evilness is unarguable, but because it urges us to re-evaluate our morality.
Part II: New Ways of the Poetics of Remembrance

4. Reconsidering Memory
(Péter Nádas: The End of a Family Saga; László Márton: Shadowy High Street)

4.1. Changes in Representing the Holocaust
Postmodern work of art does not claim relevance as a “social phenomenon” (Adorno). Instead of closed structures, postmodern aesthetics rather deals with narrative plurality. It is a fundamental observation of the second and third generations, that remembrance cannot maintain the unique, particular event of the past, but it is confronted with the images of its own construction of memory. The texts of these generations reflect rather on the process of recollection, than on the subject of memory.

Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* has a special importance in the American research of Holocaust-remembrance, since it opens new ways for representation. In the genre of the comics language is interwoven with visuality. *Maus* contains a lot of drawings that are based on photographs of the Holocaust that gained iconic value. Marianne Hirsch, the creator of the term *postmemory* considers *Maus* as the eminent work of the second generation. The concept of postmemory tries to describe the attitude of a specific generation. Hirsch applies psychological discourse here as well. Her chain of thought is based on trauma, identification, repetition; and according to her, postmemorial art is based on fantasy, re-writing and projection. It reveals the dynamic of mourning and melancholy. Mourning leads to fixation, canonization of signs, whereas melancholy opens them up by repetition, dissemination.

4.2. Péter Nádas: The End of a Family Saga
The novel of Nádas gives an account of the complex process of forgetting, and it tells us more about it than just describing the remembrance of successive generations. The phases of oblivion are: individual relationship with the past (Grandfather), denying the relationship with the past (Father), falling out of this relationship (Son). Such categories as sin, freedom, fate lose their meaning, and thus the transferability of past’s narrative is given up. Nádas’s novel uncovers the „archeology of the self”, with special regard to the sensual, instinctive level. Temporal existence becomes thus apparent through the narrating voice which stands in the intersection of mythical, historical and sensual planes. The rupture of memory is a result of a lot of factors: the choices of the predecessors, the temporal processes of oblivion, the destroying effect of the Holocaust and Communism, and the personal response to sensual challenge. The novel carries on with *Fatelessness*s’s questioning moral distinction between victim and perpetrator. But here it is not an argument of the text, but rather the consequence of representing the importance of sensual impressions.
In Nádas’s novel, the body of the father and the (unuttered) absence of the mother play a central role. Derrida’s *Who is the Mother?* can help us to understand these phenomena. Derrida here speaks about the relationship between testimony and fatherhood. The shift from matriarchy to patriarchy is the base, according to Freud, of the whole paradigm of the non-sensual (such as of logic or religion). In the „story of the ancestors” the grandfather tries to pass on the *logos* to Peter Simon, the grandson. Derrida’s final remark is that often the mother is missing as well, and the father can step into her role – that is, the tradition of the *logos* is not unambiguous at all.

4.3. László Márton: Shadowy High Street

The scenario of Márton’s novel is highly complex – history and imagination, recollection and creation, photograph and text, essay and fiction are interwoven. The narration is self-reflexive to its utmost, and it does not let the position of the „omnipotent creator” to emerge. It also interrupts the story when recollection would reproduce the vanished world of the massacred Hungarian Jews. The most important gesture of the novel’s remembrance is its own liquidation.

4.4. Photographs in the Contemporary Literature of the Holocaust

According to Marianne Hirsch, the set of images of the Holocaust is the foundation of postmemory – but these images take part in mental and emotional processes, so one might say that they become fictitious, and they constitute our fantasies of the past. In László Márton’s novel, the photographs depicting Hungarian provincial Jewry finally fade away – as a gesture, it shows that the content of these pictures is the subject of modification and forgetting. This attitude to photography is very different from that of János Pilinszky’s, who believed that these pictures reveal the essence of reality.

In the second, expanded edition of Szilárd Borbély’s *Pompes Funébres* we find a version of the photograph taken in Auschwitz that Pilinszky found so important – but here we see a “redrawn” version of it, and it is embedded in the sequence of baroque engravings of the Passion that illustrate the book. This gesture is very similar to that of Spiegelman, when he uses the pictures taken in Buchenwald in his *Maus*; but in Borbély’s work the transition of the picture into the “language” of drawing does not merely reflect a personal relationship with the image of the past. The context of this picture in *Pompes Funébres* is very ironic. By showing us that this image of Auschwitz gained ionic value and became linked with the Passion, *Pompes Funébres* also indicates that our statements about the suffering of the Other are always a subject of figuration.
5. The Poetics of Mourning
(Szilárd Borbély: \textit{Pompes Funébres})

5.1. The Rhetorics of Mourning in Szilárd Borbély’s \textit{Pompes Funébres}

In his \textit{Mémoires for Paul de Man}, Derrida speaks about the rhetorics of mourning. The finite, limited memory tries to contain the ungraspable Other, but it can only get hold of the Other’s traces. The tropes of mourning and remembrance are: allegory and prosopopeia. Derrida distinguishes between „possible” and „impossible” mourning – the first one is reconciled with the fixation of the Other through these tropes, while the latter one tries to „set free” the memory of the Other. Borbély’s book, with its highly rhetorical language based on allegorization reflects on the rhetoric nature of mourning.

5.2. Reading Szilárd Borbély’s \textit{Pompes Funébres}

The tripartite volume’s first section is built around the central trope of Christ’s death. The linguistic awareness of the texts classifies resurrection as mere figuration. At the same time, in several poems we read about the suffering, dying person’s identification with Christ. Dissemination takes place within the sign „Christ”. The Passion, represented by \textit{Pompes Funébres}, is most aggressive – here sacrifice lacks any aim and purpose, and there is no mercy for the victim. It is however the collective signifier of the reality of suffering.

In the second major part of the book we find another meta-text that implies the tradition of allegorical understanding: that is the myth of Amor and Psyche. But here it has been re-written, and its centre is the rape and murder that takes place in the relationship of Amor and Psyche. Thus traditional discourse distinguishing between body and soul turns into a discourse about the subconscious, in-human aggression, which is linked with the first section’s understanding of sin. Linguistic awareness here points out the destructive potential of concept-building language and ideation. Language seems as a means of deceit and destruction.

The third part of the volume is based on the characteristic discourse of the chasidic piety, which here once again enables an impersonal lyric register. Nothing separates Jesus from his people here: he is the Messiah to come, and he is there in the Holocaust dying with the others. We find explicit reference to post-Holocaust theological trends, however it is presented in a very ironical context, since we know that the speakers of poems were massacred, executed, but here they speak as if they were still living. One of the conclusions of this part of \textit{Pompes Funébres} is that the meaning of the discourse about God is not guaranteed by God himself, but by the suffering man, moreover, the killed man – that is why it can only be approached by the radical irony of prosopopeia.
5.3. Conclusions of Reading Pompes Funébres

According to Walter Benjamin, baroque allegory cannot be understood without its theological context. Borbély uses this aspect of the allegory in a very inventive way in *Pompes Funébres*, since by interrupting readers’ expectations and by interchanging between approaches he attains at the projection of the theological sphere onto the poetic one, and the penetration of the radical paradoxity uncovered by poetics into theology.

Though baroque allegory is conscious of its materiality, says Benjamin, it is still able to designate the possibility of nature’s redemption – and the redemption of the body, of matter and of language as well. Deconstructive criticism in Borbély’s book is very radical; it points out the impossibility of emerging from the realm of the rhetoric. But it is also the only means of marking out the region of the unspeakable, that of the „impossible mourning” which withstands narcistic introjection (Derrida), where the memory of the Other can dwell. The ironic use of allegory in *Pompes Funébres* radically points out the border of the „possible” and it leaves open the space of the „impossible”.

This demarcation also indicates another territory. Derrida in *Rams* calls the introjection of the „possible mourning” as normative. Melancholy in this sense violates norms. Derrida says the same about forgiveness. He distinguishes it from the idea of expedience, the „cure of memory”, the balance of grieving… Forgiveness can only take place as the realization of the impossible, the remission of the unforgivable. In *Pompes Funébres*, the space of forgiveness remains empty not because it is denied, but because it is opened up.

**SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH**

An important result of my research is that the tension between the ethical/theological aspect and the rhetorical nature of witness became apparent. The issue of the Holocaust needs to be approached also in its ethical/theological context, therefore the work of art that bears its representation calls out for such contextualization as well.

I consider Adorno’s „prohibition of the image” as the primary response of aesthetics to the rupture of the Holocaust – and for later generations it serves as a point of reference of representing the Holocaust. In the heart of *Bildverbot* lies the aim of preserving the unicality and the dignity of the suffering, persecuted victim, whose memory has to be kept away from the totalizing effect of metaphorization. This is the ethical element of negative aesthetics; and since Adorno speaks about it using terms borrowed from theological discourse, it is a very interesting points where these aspects intersect. *Bildverbot* addresses the mimetic-representing functions of language, thus it is rooted in a rhetorical
attitude. But one has to see, that witness cannot „shield” its subject from the figuration of memory. Michael Rothberg’s observation of the metaphorical use of the name „Auschwitz” in Adorno’s writings is a crucial one. Rothberg also points it out, that the trope „after Auschwitz” appears in these texts as a chronotopos, and „Holocaust” serves as the model of the realization of the absolute evil. What we understand here is that the idea of Bildverbot – though its aim is an opposing one – handles „Holocaust” in a figurative way, because of the generic rhetorical condition of witnessing language.

According to Adorno, for memory, art is the only means of speaking (and it is most ironic that in the eye of contemporary research of Holocaust-representation he appears as the protector of documentary approach as opposed to the artistic one.)

In the sequence of the founding texts of the Hungarian literature of the Holocaust I have been examining, the works of Pilinszky offer themselves as the field of theological approach; and Kertész’s Fatelessness (and the texts linked with it) enable ethical inquiry. In Pilinszky’s oeuvre, we find different accounts of the relationship between the Christian tradition and the event of the Holocaust. The poem An Apocryph summarizes the theodictic questions raised in the oeuvre – here, and in other poems with the same approach the controversial, fractured relationship of the Holocaust and the Passion is expressed by a complex, interrupted diction. In the latter part of the oeuvre, „Auschwitz” appears in a poetic language that creates dense metaphorical connections in order to speak about the correlation of sinfulness and existence, and their integration in the event of the Passion.

Pilinszky’s writings on aesthetics lack the acknowledgement of the rhetorical nature of witness. (It is very interesting therefore to put together Ricoeur’s and Lévinas’s account on witness with Derrida’s Faith and Knowledge, where he describes testimony as a speech act. It might be said, that the more radical our comprehension about the rhetorical nature of witness is, the more committed the one who bears witness should be.) The poem An Apocryph contains this perception; but Pilinszky’s aesthetic writings, that often deal with questions of testimony and art, fail to see it, and they also fail to reflect on their own rhetorical processes as well. (Therefore I find it important to distinguish between the consequences of reading Pilinszky’s poetry and essays.) Pilinszky finds the link between art and witness as essential as Adorno; but here the concept of reparation through the remembrance of poetry appears explicitly, and it is rooted in eschatological faith.

The relationship of art and memory appears in Imre Kertész’s works rather as the relationship of fiction and memory, and it is completely deprived of the idea of reparation. Figuration of remembrance is a basic observation of Fatelessness, therefore the novel uses a diction that deconstructs canonized memorial forms and also the horizon of biographic narrative: and this is the most complex structure of the ironic fiction. In recent years studies of the novel
gave an excellent account of deconstructive processes in *Fatelessness* that concern the relationship between memory and metaphorization, and also between memory and narratives. However, I believe that our understanding of the novel should not stop here, but this can be a starting point of reaching out to its deeper layers of meaning. After comprehending the impossibility of mimetic representation, the novel presents the Holocaust as a model that explores the insufficiency of our identity-forming ethical narratives and our exposure to evil.

Irony in Kertész’s novel leads us to the works of the successive generations. Generational change results in a shift of focus in the texts: memorial processes and their rhetorics become their main concern. Successors are confronted with mediated, canonized signs of the past, they experience detachedness and the modification of memories – in other words, *oblivion*. Instead of trying to work out the poetics of authentic testimony, the ethical aspect of witness in the works of the successive generations aims rather at the precise exposure of the processes of forgetting, as we see it in Péter Nádas’s or László Márton’s novels.

In the research of Holocaust-remembrance, understanding references and allusions to photography in literary texts leads to some very interesting insight into the nature of (post)memory. In the works of the second and third generations, photographs are not the means of recollection, but they are rather indications of the transformation of memory into fixed image, as the index of loss. It is very different from Pilinszky’s references to the picture taken in Auschwitz: according to Pilinszky, it offers revelation and identification to its viewer. The re-drawing of the same photograph in Szilárd Borbély’s volume can be as important for the Hungarian research of representing the Holocaust, as Spiegelman’s images were for the American scholarship. This gesture of Borbély’s book however leads us to further conclusions than the transformation of canonized images in one’s personal memory. In *Pompes Funébres*, re-drawing reflects upon the mediated nature of mourning, the rhetorics of grief.

The representation of the Holocaust in Pilinszky’s and Kertész’s works is very different, yet, they serve as a powerful tradition in Hungarian literature. The texts I have selected for my research carry on with this tradition, but their relationship with it is often conflicting. In Borbély’s book we find several references to Pilinszky, and in his other works to Kertész, Nádas, Márton. These references sometimes do not lack criticism, but the dialogue is very productive.

*Pompes Funébres* presents the witness of suffering and death rather as grief. The remembrance of the Other here ingathers the great traditions of lamentation, the discourse of the Passion, and of the Holocaust, as well. The ethical and theological questions of suffering return once again, and the texts also speak about man’s inclination to evil and God’s loss of omnipotence. But the context of these themes is the book’s special, strong irony. When speaking about disbelief in resurrection, this poetry uses a diction which traditionally is rooted in the belief of resurrection. Borbély uses liturgic forms, and he revives
baroque allegory – but this is the ironic “resurrection” of the allegory – the major trope of the rhetorics of mourning. One of the conclusions of *Pompes Funèbres* is that our concept of the resurrection is based on allegorization. Speaking about baroque allegory, Walter Benjamin points out, that it is a trope that is aware of its material nature, and through the sinfulness of matter, of its own “sin” as well – but it performs an inversion, and it is able to designate resurrection as its own “apotheosis”. In Borbély’s book, fractured, ironic allegorization does not lead to such apotheosis, but it designates the unspeakable realm of the “impossible mourning” which still contains the memory of the Other.

**PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO PHD TOPIC**

- A Holokauszt tanúsága Pilinszky János „evangéliumi esztétikájában”. In: Jelenkor 2009/1.

**Conference Presentation:**