

István Dobos: Autobiography

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In what sense am I going to use the term autobiography in this presentation? Please allow me to start with an outline of the theoretical framework that I will apply in my approach to this issue.

First of all, I would like to call your attention to a paradoxical situation in the history of literary theory. The theories on autobiography were formed surprisingly late, even if we consider that the concept of autobiography itself was established relatively late, in the 18th century. Considered to be one of the classics today, George Gusdorf's article was published in 1956. However, it was only from the 70s on that actual theoretical debates appeared concerning the genre of autobiography. Now, why do I call this situation paradoxical? The reason for this is as follows. The theory on autobiography was formulated when "first of all, post-structuralist theories challenged the most basic element of autobiography, i.e., the 'I,' the subject, and the plausibility of its textual representation; second of all, the concept of genre and the classifications on the basis of genres were also called into question; and, third of all, the formation of the genre theory and the canon of autobiography coincided with the establishment of feminist and post-colonial criticism which, among other things, questioned the traditional literary canons, too." Fourth of all, the formulation of the theory on autobiography was also concurrent with the development and expansion of the discipline of cultural science. Cultural science "cancels the highlighted position of literature as a privileged discourse of culture. The texts that have been considered literary before, together with all other manifestations of culture, are supposed to be treated from this point on as texts or discursive phenomena." It is obvious that the task of arranging the concepts on autobiography into a coherent narrative within the context of a multitude of competing new theories is a difficult one. There always seems to be a position cropping up in which one or another statement relating to autobiography can be contested or discredited. This situation was characterized with due irony by the critic Couser, who contended that "on the one hand, autobiography is declared to be problematic or even impossible while, on the other hand, it is considered to be the paradigm of all kinds of writing. Some critics view it as a genre that is non-existent or one that has exhausted its potentials, while others assume that it is inevitable and universal."

Nearly all the components of the above definition by Gusdorf have exerted considerable influence on the institutionalization of the genre and theory of autobiography as well as on that of the individual autobiographies. For this reason, it might not be amiss if I list them below. Accordingly, autobiography: 1., is related to modernity, as the precondition of its establishment was the renunciation of the mythic view of the world, 2., requires an individual or personality who is willing to undergo self-analysis and considers him/herself a topic worthy of immortalization, and 3., the personality in autobiography creates a unified story out of his/her self-narrative and, by reconstructing a unity covering a life span, generates a meaning for his/her story.

In my opinion, autobiography can be defined as a narrative genre whose narrator gives an account of his or her own life story in the form of reminiscences. Autobiography is closely related to the genres of *memoir*, *diary*, and *biography*. What differentiates it from these other genres is that a memoir does not take one's personal life for its subject matter, a diary is not necessarily characterized by a look back upon past events, while in the case of a biography, the author and the narrator

is not the same person. However, a common feature shared by all these four genres is that they are not purely literary genres. The reason for this is that their authors are not automatically classified as belletrists. In the canonization of autobiographies, the aspect of literary artistic creation frequently turns out to be of secondary importance only, especially when compared with the psychological, historical, or other aspects at work.

The genre presupposes at least three kinds of selves or "I"-s: the self of the author, the "I" of the autobiographical narrator, and the narrated autobiographical "I."

According to Philippe Leujeune, autobiography, as a genre, is based on a kind of a contract or agreement. The most important condition and guarantee for this agreement is that the author, the narrator, and the protagonist should be fully identical. In order to comply with the agreement, the reader is supposed to read the text as a reliable account of events that have actually happened, given by a real life, responsible person. On the one hand, the liberty of fictitiousness in autobiographies is restricted by the factual quality of the events related. On the other hand, there is yet a constant suspicion of fictitiousness present in the reading that adheres to the letter of the "autobiographical pact." Namely, in the case of fiction, the text does not state that the author, the narrator, and the protagonist are indeed identical. In this case, the reader, in opposition to the author, tries to establish similarities among them. As regards autobiography, the sameness of the author, the narrator, and the protagonist is clearly stated. At the same time, the reader is inclined to find discrepancies (defects or distortions) among them. That is to say, the perspective of the author and that of the reader do not necessarily overlap. Even the autobiographical pact cannot fully force the reader to accept the prescriptions of the text arising from the common identity of the names. After all, everything depends on what the reader decides to accept. If, for some reason, the name of the author is not known, the consequence concerning the situation of the genre can easily be as uncertain as in the case of a protagonist who is not named or identified.

According to autobiographical reading, the events related are not created by language but instead they are immortalized as it were through the recording of the object of reminiscence or observation in the text. The realm of experience and events in this case is prior to language. Thus, in autobiography, the role of language is constative rather than performative or productive, unlike in the case of fictional genres. In autobiography, the factual quality of events can be theoretically substantiated. However, the process of arranging the events into a life story presumes a perspective that is irreplaceable. The reason for this is that it is only me who can relate the story of my life from the point of view of the person who has experienced it.

The need for self-expression and self-interpretation comprises an organic part of the autobiographical venture. It is therefore not incidental at all that, in the histories of the genre, one frequently encounters the metaphor of the mirror. The mirror, according to Georges Gusdorf's theory, stands for a psychological analysis of the self, when it is related to autobiography. The person desiring self-analysis can contemplate his or her soul in the mirror. As an aside, I must admit at this stage that the feminists rightly apply strong criticism on Gusdorf's theory. The fact is that, according to him, the only worthy subject of autobiography can be someone who has substantially contributed to the systematic development of world history, i.e., an outstanding man. The mirror metaphor is nevertheless important, since autobiography, according to this view, can actually be considered a genre reflecting and exploring the spirituality of the self. Arising from the definition of autobiography as self-scrutiny, all the theoretical declarations are made almost exclusively about western culture.

What is it then that makes the “unified” concept of autobiography problematic? First of all, it is due to the fact that post-structuralist theories on the subject have challenged the plausibility of the formulation of the self through language. The concepts about the vanishing of the personality are fairly widely known, so it should suffice if I only very briefly allude to some of the more decisive contexts in this respect. Lacan’s work and the related psychoanalytical language criticism belong here in the first place. Roland Barthes has pointed out the impossibility of establishing the foundation for the unity of the text that exists as fabric of languages. He is the one who has canceled the principle of the author and that of the origin. We can also note Foucault, who has challenged the traditional referentiality of the author’s name and replaced it with the concept of the function of the text. Thus he undercut the validity of the concept of the artist, of the unmistakable authorial personality so much revered a century before.

The self, i.e., “the narrating subject” is by all means the central point of the autobiographical work, which can be approached in a number of different ways. One of the extreme examples of these approaches considers him/her a real-life person, while the other extreme would simply make do with a rhetorical trope. In the case of this latter position, it is questionable if a relationship can be established among the author, the narrator of the autobiography, and the narrated autobiographical self. Consequently, there is a risk that the self becomes nothing else but a textualized sign, and thus the autobiography becomes indistinguishable from all other fictional texts.

Nevertheless, the completely identical quality of the author, the narrator, and the protagonist in autobiographies does not mean that there is also a perfect continuity between the reminiscing “I” and the recollected “I.” On the contrary, one of the essential guarantees of the authenticity of autobiographies is a distance between the two “I”-s, as long as we accept that the human personality inevitably undergoes certain changes in the course of time.

The rising interest in Hungary about the theoretical considerations concerning autobiographical writing is not entirely independent of the recently available international research findings, which frequently involve the re-interpretations of the classics of autobiography, to which I can only allude briefly in the rest of my presentation.

One of the recurring questions in the critical literature on autobiographies concerns the issue of the authenticity and verifiability of autobiographical stories from the aspect of the world outside the text. In my opinion, the verification of texts from the aspect of facts, even in the case of contemporary authors, can only be partially carried out. Paul Ricoeur’s book called *Soi-même comme un autre* can assist in accepting the fact that there can hardly be a way for verifying the events that occur in one’s soul. The reference of spiritual events is available even for the person experiencing them as verbal reference and not as factuality prior to language.

The fictive and the actual are textually conditioned, and the contradictions arising from this point can be illustrated with Derrida’s help. According to his essay called *Fiction et témoignage*, autobiography and confession are closely related to testimony, while this latter is connected to secret. Secret here means that “whatever I testify about, no one else can attest for me.” At the same time, this indispensable condition for confession as a testimony structurally incorporates the possibility of perjury or lying. The reason for this is that the performative power of language is indistinguishable from its mediatory function.

There exist certain scholarly texts which are focused on the discursive undermining of the genre of autobiography. These efforts provoke a revision of the readers’

expectations. Because it is fairly widely known, it should suffice if I only allude to the rhetoricity theory of Paul de Man, which claims the unidentifiability of fictive and non-fictive in autobiographical narratives. Beside the uncontrollable mechanisms of language, we can also see quite frequently that a number of contemporary literary texts do not validate the traditional story-focused quality of autobiography. Instead, they suspend the goal-oriented process of the narrative, loosen the discursive logic that connects the individual elements of the story to one another, and break up the temporal and spatial relations corresponding to the experience of verisimilitude. I think that these features of the texts can also be the result of conscious artistic efforts. They exploit the possibilities of language that allow for the free reign of productive reading and thus rewrite the genre of autobiography.

The way I see it, referentiality should not be defined as opposed to textuality. By textuality, here I mean the way the poetical-rhetorical mechanisms of the texts work. A distinction has to be made though between the verbal and non-verbal conceptions of reference. The non-verbal conception or, in other words, the substantial referential mode, takes the possession of the facts by the text to be given. The verbal, or semiotic referential mode asserts that the facts form their character within the process of meaning. Since the context is that of the text, substantial reference is also exposed to these latter ones. In my opinion, it is not at all just in the sense of the free and uncontrollable play of the meaning that we can discern textual dynamics in the autobiographical text. The fact is that the textualizing processes do not only withdraw rules from the interpreter of the text but also impose new rules, which force the readers to follow textual movement. Therefore, the functioning of the text cannot be subordinated to the subversive arbitrariness of the readers either.

Following this brief theoretical elucidation of the meaning of autobiography in this presentation, I will focus upon introducing three paradigmatic personality constructions of Hungarian autobiography in the 20th century. The faith in the integrity of the self is represented by Sándor Márai's *Egy polgár vallomásai* [Confessions of a Middle-Class Citizen], the dissolution of the boundaries of the self is manifested in Lőrinc Szabó's *Tücsökzene* [Cricket-Chirping], while the postmodern multiplication of the self is illustrated through *Harmonia caelestis* by Péter Esterházy.

By way of introduction, let me just very briefly refer to the antecedents as far as the genre is regarded. Among the works of autobiographical relevance in Hungarian literature, one should first note the pieces created by autobiographers in Transylvania in the 17th century. The peculiar language use in these works was resuscitated by Péter Esterházy in his *Tizenhét hattyúk* [Seventeen Swans], a fictitious autobiography written as a postmodern re-rendering of the genre under the pen-name Lili Csokonai in the second half of the 20th century. From the time period of Romanticism, fewer autobiographies and more memoirs and diaries are extant to us. The most notable among these would probably be the memoirs of Mór Jókai written about the war of independence of 1848-49. In the 20th century, Sándor Márai's *Egy polgár vallomásai* [Confessions of a Citizen] is the first work on the list of autobiographies of literary merit.

Sándor Márai (1900-1989) spent seven years on the preparations for writing a book about his home town and his childhood. The first volume of *Egy polgár vallomásai* [Confessions of a Middle-Class Citizen] (1934-1935) discusses the topic of breaking away from home, while the second volume argues for the pointlessness and the impossibility of separation.

It is not by accident that the title of the book has the word *confession* in it. The writer was brought up in a wealthy bourgeois family of German extraction with strict moral standards. The narrator gives an account of the process of his own growing into

adulthood. In this process, it was the middle-class environment that determined his overall behavior and character. This environment served as a point of departure for him, yet his destination turned out to be quite different from what the decisive social and educational motivations in his case would make us expect.

Apart from the confessional quality, Márai's book is also characterized by the most important features of memoirs. Márai, just like the great memoirists, tells us what he went through at the more significant pivotal points of his life. Yet he expands his story in the direction of fiction, i.e., in the direction of the autobiographical novel. The writer is aware that the events of one's personal life that comprise the material for one's autobiography are hidden in the realm of memories. A retrospective narrative, however, is not an "imprint" of memory but rather the producer of recollections saturated with the fancy of certain personal values and choices. In the case of this book then, there is a double referent for the description: on the one hand, it renders the story, while on the other hand, it also depicts the process of remembering, as such.

Yet Márai does not simply delineate his own and his family's life story but also gives a portrait of the age. Through this portrait, he presents the changes that occurred in the historical position, culture, and attitudes of the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, he does this in such a way that the confessing autobiographical self becomes confronted with the questions concerning his own personality, system of values, and objectives. For the existential self-understanding of the subject executing the act of remembering, it is the memories that provide the "raw material." Thus, all of the actions, decisions, and human relations of this subject are coupled with the feeling of being an outsider. However, it is exactly this regenerated experience of homelessness, rootlessness, and separation that finds some resolution and comfort in the process of writing.

The first volume starts with a detailed presentation of the paternal home. The perception of time standing still, however, is retained even after this description is over. It is only the death of the Austro-Hungarian heir apparent and the running away from home of the 14-year-old boy that disrupts this idyllic state of affairs. At this point, the reminiscing narrator declares that the narration cannot be continued in the same fashion, and the continuity of the peaceful snapshots and stills is broken off.

The reminiscing subject, himself a wealthy middle-class youth from *Kassa* [present-day Kosice, Slovakia], keeps his eyes open for social discrepancies, too. He feels that "minden emberi méltóságon esett sérelem megaláz minden embert" [each individual offense against human dignity humiliates all people]. Yet, he does not experience any specific offense beyond this general humiliation. It is at this stage, at age 14, that he flees from the protected community of the family for a few days. Analyzing this childhood flight from the home later, he arrives at the following generalization: "Nem tartozom senkihez.", "szemléletemben, életmódomban, lelki magatartásomban polgár vagyok, s mindenütt hamarabb érzem otthon magam, mint polgárok között." [I don't belong to anyone. As regards my views, my lifestyle, and my spiritual attitudes, I am a middle-class person, and yet I feel more at home anywhere else than among middle-class people.] With time, he gets used to this predicament. The constant state of homelessness becomes natural for him. He feels free when he is alone and lonesome.

One of the most important layers presented in the novel reflects the image of the solid and binding system of traditions of the middle-class. This layer of society is characterized by a steady and mature knowledge of the world, a modest but not indigent lifestyle, diligence, and respect for creative work. And indeed, the representatives of the middle-class were marked by a strict, almost ascetic realism. Their actions were controlled by reason, and nothing was stranger to them than

spiritual instability or a dangerous, foreboding irrationality. Our narrator can never fully succeed in detaching himself from the bourgeois order. In his autobiography, he renders the story of his secession from the middle class while remaining faithful to the bourgeois ideal of life. In Márai's book, the myth of *Kassa* occupies a central position. It is a myth of a city representing the stability of middle-class culture, symbolically guarded by the cathedral towering over the city. This cathedral functions as an emblem of traditions that are protective and restrictive at the same time. Meanwhile, the image of "monarchical Vienna" crops up at various parts of the piece, and it actually carries a very important meaning. Márai's memory envisions Vienna as a haven of tranquillity and peace, the quiet and friendly home for Central European culture. For him, it is a place whose important constituent element is its playfulness, its deferment of finding satisfactory answers to the questions posed by life. With its steady calmness and ceaseless music, this city embodies a kind of protecting force. With full vigor yet with due fairness, Márai wished to face the world in which he could not find a home for himself anymore. Márai was a middle-class citizen, however, he did not feel at home in the world of the middle class. Only when he finally accepted this intermediate position, did he indeed become a writer.

He depicted the world of the middle class with intimacy and with a touch of nostalgia. Nevertheless, there was always a definite distance he kept between himself and this nostalgic compassion. Márai thought that it was the members of the middle class who actually established the possibility for people to ask questions and express their doubts freely. Nonetheless, the middle class layer evolved into a huge mass and the possession of power made it rather complacent. The author thought that it was satisfied with the inherited and ready-made conditions or with empty skepticism, void of actual demands. Hence the distance kept by him.

The narrator unconditionally respects human dignity. In the world created by *The Confessions of a Middle-Class Citizen*, even the middle class with its traditional lifestyle acknowledges the value of independent personalities. The way of life and view of life of uncles, independent lawyers, tradesmen, and bankers exerted a strong influence on the giver of the confession, who found his independence in writing. According to the value system of autobiographical novels, the most salient feature of a self-sustained personality is the effort to think independently. The writer depicts the contemporary barriers in front of education with delicate irony.

This confession is also the expression of a generation's awareness of life. The members of this generation were torn out of their middle-class existence, survived the war and the revolutions, and had to realize that the age of order and safety was over. What ensued was the "fashion of slogans" or the period of utopias. For Márai's narrator, the possibility for retaining his real personality was offered by literature. The writing, i.e., work itself, helped to recall the way of life conducted by the generation of the fathers. This is how he found a home in permanent homelessness. This is how he could get close to the "whole" which has been broken up in this age. Nevertheless, Márai proved that it could still be retained through the activity of writing, as well as through the unity of the personality.

The second piece selected for the purpose of analysis is a lyric autobiography. Lőrinc Szabó's grand composition called *Tücsökzene* [Cricket Chirping] was published in 1947, and it came with the subtitle *Rajzok egy élet tájairól* [Drawings about the Landscapes of a Life]. The title refers to one summer night when, prompted by the chirping sounds of crickets through the open window, the lyric self begins reminiscing about past moments. What follows is the poet remembering the course of his life with the purpose of contemplating on the meaning of life. The first poem removes the poet from the "superior" position of a creator of texts. According to its self-reflexive code, it

is the text that produces the self and not the self producing the text. The chirping of crickets, as a reflection on the process of remembering, keeps recurring in the text, while the self appears in a number of different versions.

In *Cricket Chirping*, the guiding principle of the genre of remembrance and autobiography is implemented in such a way that the self is present in its split quality, acting or speaking at different points in time, and the reminiscing self and the recollected self are not identical. There are various kinds of voices that emerge in the text, and even the reminiscing self is not identical with himself. Thus the recalling-reminiscing entity cannot be circumscribed since the owner of the voices cannot be pinpointed. So the personality in *Cricket Chirping* is vocal in a multitude of voices, however, sometimes it is quite impossible to decide in which temporal position. The texts emphasize their own linguistically and rhetorically created quality. The treatment of one and the same topic in several consecutive poems creates a structure of utterances built upon compound shifts of point of view. Consequently, the personality is not at all homogeneous, and it cannot be characterized with the help of a single comprehensive strategy. The speakers do not control the entirety of the memories prompted to be recalled by the chirping of the crickets: "életem beszél, s amint hallgatom, /mondom, amit mond" [my life is talking, and as I listen to it/ I say what it says]. The subtitle "rajzok egy élet tájáról" [drawings about the landscapes of a life] refers to the fact that, in order to represent a re-created life, more than one voice is necessary. The linear structure of autobiography becomes decomposed in this piece. The text is unable to reconstruct the personality in the form of stories. The de-centered structure indicates exactly the fact that the past has not come together in one single unity, i.e., it has not "recorded itself," and thus the position of the self can be assumed to be more like a plausibility than the virtual space reserved for the self.

Péter Esterházy is reputed to be a significant innovator of form in the history of Hungarian autobiography in the twentieth century. In his recent *Harmónia Caelestis* (published in the year 2000), he renders a fictitious history of the Esterházy family through creating an infinite number of imaginary father figures. Esterházy's narrator rejects the possibility of making a distinction between the autobiographical and the fictional aspects. The following are just a few examples to support this claim: first of all, he obliterates the differences between the actual and the fictitious, between the remembered and the imagined, and between language and reality. For the narrator, who was born at the beginning of the fifties, the real challenge is not represented by the act of precisely evoking the actual events of the past or that of exercising control over his recollections, let alone by the linguistic representation of personal memories, but by the plausibility of creating the self. The novel examines the possibilities for representing the self from a multitude of angles. In the narrative, it is the conditional aspect that is considered the guiding principle. Therefore, the text is worth reading chiefly as a specimen of continuous playful border crossings between the individual genres. The binary opposition between truth and lying, as well as the one between image and likeness is invalidated as early as in the first three numbered sentences of the novel. The text thus emphasizes the made-up quality of the characters featured in the Esterházy's saga. Esterházy's narrator never ceases to search for the personal meaning of the lives invented. He keeps on probing the feasibility of writing autobiography. The way he does this is by imagining father figures and continuously re-creating himself along with, and through, these ever-changing figures.

At the most basic level of the story-telling, the presence of the conditional aspect, or the *als ob* quality, is due to the fact that the fictional narrator of the novel treats fancy and memory on equal terms. At the same time, the novel also gives the impression of being an example of literature about literature. The narrator's reflections focused on a novel

which is being written simultaneously have a very important role in it. Esterházy re-writes the various types of autobiography in an ironic fashion with the help of the literary figure called “a novel about a novel.” Apart from the conventions of autobiographical writings, the novel also incorporates the re-interpreted versions of family sagas, historical novels, tales, legends, genealogies, and of several minor genres, such as jokes, anecdotes, and short stories. Similarly to the earlier novel called *Bevezetés a szépirodalomba* [Introduction to Belles-Lettres], *Harmónia Caelestis* can also be dubbed an introduction, in the sense that it first debunks and then re-creates the conventions of the genre of recollections-based autobiographies, and thus prepares the readers for the reception of narrative forms hitherto absent from autobiographical writing in Hungary.

Esterházy’s book questions the validity of the most basic rules of the genre of autobiography. With some exaggeration, one could say that even the actual starting point of the novel is not evident either. The book allows for several potential beginnings, thus ironically evoking the unresumability of the autobiographical convention of the original starting point as such. The narrative opens up free passageways among the realms of recollection, self-interpretation, and the novel form. However, it remains to be decided which one of these realms can be considered the primary one.

Personally, I would think that it is the representation of the attempt at understanding one’s self from the father’s point of view that makes it possible to read the novel in the spirit of reinterpreting the conventions of autobiographical writing. The narrator consistently refers to himself as “édesapám fia” [my father’s son]. As I have mentioned above, he offers a catalog of various father figure portraits. Regarding these portraits, he fails to provide an answer to the question who this person actually is (“ki is ez az ember”). It also remains undecided whether it is the son or the father that the Hungarian question word “ki” [i.e., who] refers to in the novel. *Harmonia caelestis* is still connected to the tradition of autobiographical writing if we accept one of the potential interpretations suggested by the book. According to this, the boundaries for self-understanding and self-narrative are always set for the individual by the inaccessibility of the meaning of another person’s life. “Apám fia vállat vont, nem értette apámat.” [My father’s son shrugged his shoulders, he did not understand my father.] (50) The sentence cited here can be perceived as the summing up of this experience in understanding.

The self, or the “I,” which the narrator refrains from uttering, appears to be temporarily identifiable only in a relationship with the unfathomable meaning of a fictitious other person. Even so, the narrative parts intermingling with self-interpretation are incapable of erasing from the text the question of “ki vagyok én” [Who am I?] related to the notion of the autobiographical subject. This autobiographical subject is a divided entity in Esterházy’s book, where the schism between the narrative self and the narrated self seems to be insurmountable. The doubt concerning the identity and the linguistic representation of the self can be illustrated through the ironic sentence 207 in the book made up of numbered sentences. “Eltűnt közte és a világ közt a különbség, és édesapám úgy érezte, most ő az Ich-Erzähler.” [The difference between him and the world disappeared, and my father felt that it was him who was the *Ich-Erzähler*.] The portrayal of the image of the father as a figure means supplying various faces and removing them, and this process of constant defacement proves to be infinite. The character that is supposed to serve as the structural focus keeps losing or blurring his own outlines. One wonders if the fiction of the evolving novel is able to create a distinct personality for the narrator. How much can we possibly find out about a narrator who is reluctant to

pronounce “I” directly? Who can provide the meaning for the cycles of figure and role changes? The actually open question posed by the novel is about the issue of the identifiability of this “who,” i.e., the essence of the autobiographer’s self.

Esterházy provides a re-interpreted version of one of the important conventions of autobiographical writing through exempting himself from the autobiographer’s obligation to directly expose himself.

A reference to the above issue is also present in the subtitle of the book. *Egy Esterházy család vallomásai* [Confessions of an Esterházy Family] rejects perhaps the only enduring rule about the genre of *confessio* in the same sense of the word as it is used by Derrida in his *La loi du genre*: confessions can be made only by individuals and never by communities.

The novel challenges the fiction of the unity of the autobiographical “I” in a number of different ways. However, the invented narrator fights an uphill battle against the language that refers back to the subject that performs the narrative task. This feature again demonstrates that the images of the father figures basically reveal his own self, even if he replaces first person singular with third person singular forms. The appellation *my father’s son* is forced to comply with the constraints imposed by the language, and thus it re-enters the mark of the subject of autobiography into the text. Finally, I would like to stress and underline that I do not in any way whatsoever wish to set any sort of linear historical direction through the sequence of the three pieces discussed in this presentation.

The history of Hungarian autobiography in the 20th century also demonstrates the fact that, in literature, one should assume a historical interaction between forms and languages rather than a linear progress. The conditions for these interactions change from time to time. The direction of the dialog between the individual pieces cannot be exactly identified and, from a lot of aspects, the process of literary history is unpredictable. I think that it is crucial that we clearly see the following. In any given time period, there is not just one dominant literary discourse. It also seems obvious that the conditions for the dialog with the past change from time to time as well. It is contemporary literature that is especially capable of adding innovative aspects to traditional interpretations. The historical identity of works of art is not established once and for all, and this goes also for the pieces presented above.