

Accents and Locality: Hungarian Literature as a Medium of Multilingual Cultural Memory¹

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Abstract

The contemporary global circulation of literature resulting in the «multiple recontextualizations of the texts» on the one hand «undermines the previously sacrosanct monopoly of methodological nationalism in literary studies» (Tihanov 2017), while on the other hand, in these «transculturation» processes, «the shaping force of local context» (Damrosch 2003) intensifies. Considering the multilingual legacy of East-Central Europe as a permanent mobile and shared coexistence, I will argue that national literary horizons and hierarchies could be replaced by a non-centered, mobile system based on shared multilingual cultural experience. In the case of transborder Hungarian literatures, the local affiliation is created through the interaction of different languages, dialects, and linguistic references. They transform the de- and reterritorialized Hungarian language into an audible archival medium of multilingual cultural spaces, creating local perspectives by juxtaposing (conflicting) historical mnemonic legacies and differences.

Keywords

1989 regime change; East-Central European Literature; Multilingualism; Poetics of accents; transborder Hungarian literature; World literature

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«My work as a thinker has no mother tongue, only a succession of translations, displacements and adaptations to changing conditions. Nomadism for me equals multilingualism. Although this entails large doses of lexical contamination and the occasional syntactical debacle, the real 'creolisation' effects have always been, for me, acoustic. Accents are the traces of my multiple linguistic homes. They spell my own ecology of belonging, my loyalty to parallel yet divergent lives. I'm always writing with an accent».
(Braidotti 2014, 167)

1. World literature, East-Central European literature, transborder Hungarian literature

In the context of newly flourishing nationalistic and ethnocentric ideologies and mutual exclusive nationalisms, as seen in post-1989 East-Central Europe, Romanian-born American scholar Marcel Corniş-Pope stresses that focusing on 'cultural contacts' is even more important today than «during the Cold War period: literary history must venture into new areas, acting as a corrective both to narrow ethnocentric treatments of culture, but also to the counter-theories of globalism that erase distinctions between individual cultures» (Corniş-Pope 2016, 28). The contemporary global circulation of literature resulting in the «multiple recontextualizations of the texts» on the one hand «undermines the previously sacrosanct monopoly of methodological nationalism in literary studies» (Tihanov 2017, 472 and 475), but on the other hand, in such global circulation understood as a «transculturation» processes, «the shaping force of local context» (Damrosch 2003, 24-25) intensifies. Looking at these two relevant theoretical axes in contemporary debates about world literature sheds light on two important questions: What does «local context» mean, how does literature «forge a sense of locality» (Domínguez, Neumann 2018, 205), and where do literary works «arrive», how are they conceptualised after being distanced from national categorisations?

In this essay, I intend to map contemporary world literature theories with a view to global-local dynamics, and to situate the East-Central European cultural region as an important player in the global circulation and local self-understanding of contemporary literature. I argue that due to cultural interferences, the hybridity of East-Central Europe as a shared territory between different national and ethnic groups could be seen as a common non-nationalistic context, and I chart two kinds of phenomena for «multilingual locals» (Laachir, Marzagora, Orsini 2018), which deconstruct national literary hierarchies. Examining the ways in which Romanian and Hungarian texts interact with one another regarding the representation of the 1989 regime change, I suggest that literary texts are created as inherently multilingual and that Hungarian novels can be seen as mediums of multilingual cultural memory. By drawing on Hungarian and Romanian novels related to the historical events of 1989, I explore «located perspectives» (ivi, 6) on a common historical past and claim that all these works can be understood as a decomposition and transformation of the Communist ideological conditioning, and as a search for self-expression through language. Lastly, I focus on Hungarian literature as a medium of multilingual cultural memories, which restructure Hungarian cultural perception in a way that leads to the Hungarian language simultaneously oscillating between accents. The novels of Ádám Bodor, Péter Esterházy and Andrea Tompa that I examine, transform the de- and reterritorialized Hungarian language into an audible archival medium of multilingual cultural spaces, creating local perspectives by juxtaposing (conflicting) historical mnemonic legacies and differences.

In David Damrosch's methodology, world literature as an international circulation of translated (and re-translated) texts in the literary market means «shifting relations both of literary history and of cultural power» (2003, 24); equally importantly, it also means «importing culture». The values of one's culture may be seen in a differently in the light of a new, foreign context, and «there is sometimes an irony that a work may translate almost better than it reads in the original or may gain a new sort of interest in the new language, in the culture, and may actually do better abroad than at home» (2011, 176). This marketing of literature has consequences regarding the positioning and self-understanding of literature as a traditionally elite aesthetic medium, and it reconfigures the boundaries between mass and

high culture. «The idea of literary works as window on the world is very significant today. Readers can approach world literature just to get a sense of what is going on in the world, what another culture is like» (ivi, 178), and as a result, world literature as a «mode of reading» (Tihanov 2017, 468) can «expand readers' horizons and boundaries» (Damrosch 2011, 179).

However, this approach poses the dual risk of positioning writers as simply «native informants», and of reducing literature to the «anthropological exotic» (cf. Pisac 2012, 201-204). As Andrea Pisac polemically argues:

The discourse of the anthropological exotic places the foreign author in the position of having to represent their 'culture as a whole'. [...] The anthropological exotic, as a set of writing and reading practices, serves to celebrate the notion of cultural difference, yet it simultaneously assimilates that very foreignness into familiar Western interpretative codes. For a small nation whose literature is virtually unknown, such a marketing strategy provides space and a specific market-value on the international literary market, but that value is derived from its status as an object of intellectual tourism. (Ivi, 203-204)

The discourse of world literature somehow oscillates and navigates between the Scylla and Charybdis of exotic otherness and of universality as the classical approach to literary history and the comparativist tradition. Universality, according to Pascale Casanova,

is one of the most diabolical inventions of the center, for in denying the antagonistic and hierarchical structure of the world, and proclaiming the equality of all citizens of the republic of letters, the monopolists of universality command others to submit to their law. Universality is what they – and they alone – declare to be acceptable and accessible to all. (1999, 154)

Many literary scholars have already reflected on how literatures are not considered equally, how the comparative approach implies power relations and ideological tendencies, especially in the colonial context. Even comparative literature, based as it is on the romantic idea of national literatures, has a strong Eurocentric, or, more precisely Western European, aspect, as Damrosch points out in an interview. «"Traditional" comparative literature

really meant looking at the literary relations of two countries, comparing two national traditions, often France and Germany, looking at the image one nation had of another» (2011, 182).

World literature understood as the circulation of texts involves «polycentricity» and, most importantly, it creates a multiple structure for «comparison based upon incommensurability», as César Domínguez and Birgit Neumann emphasize.

Damrosch's suggestion to link seemingly unrelated texts to one another ties in with recent scholarship in comparative studies that draws attention to the limits of comparability, commensurability, and translatability and underlines the productive force of difference and incommensurability (cf., e.g., Melas; Friedman; Apter, *Against World Literature*). Broadly speaking, these approaches proceed from the assumption that the literatures of the world share, in the words of Glissant, «similarities that are not to be standardized» (254). Comparison based upon incommensurability, scholars such Radhakrishnan, Shu-mei Shih, Mufti («Global Comparatism»), and Melas maintain, offers a means of refuting Eurocentric modes of comparison, which forcefully subject non-European and non-Western literatures to the seemingly universal standards derived from a European canon. (2018, 207)

A relevant methodology for studying literary incommensurabilities is offered by Susan Stanford Friedman in her research on multiple modernisms. While I agree with Marko Juvan's critique of Friedman's methodology, pointing out that «deconstructive de-centering only masked the real-existing power relations with an invented literary-historical narrative about the aesthetic equivalence of plural modernisms» (Juvan 2019, 173)², I consider Friedman's «collage as a reading strategy for global modernisms» (2012, 517) as an efficient comparative strategy of «reciprocal defamiliarization» (Radhakrishnan's term) and a productive viewpoint.

² This idea is further developed as follows: «In other words, even though recent modernism studies are aware of and frustrated by the world-systemic inequality, their surrogate narrative secludes the aesthetic realm from the capitalist mode of production and refrains from interpreting plural modernist forms as local sediments of the global symbolic struggle with (post)colonial and (post) imperial dependence» (Juvan 2019, 173).

I don't mean to deny the power relations that affect the production and dissemination of texts. Rather, I mean that each text in the collage can appear in full geohistorical and biographical specificity (e.g., Césaire's Martinique and Cha's Korea), while at the same time can produce new insights by being read together comparatively. The absolute difference – incommensurability – of texts in the collage remains while the proposed similarity – commensurability – exists at the level of theory produced in the act of comparative reading. Such theory (e.g. diasporic modernism) can in turn change the reading of each text in its other contexts. This form of comparison produces a kind of 'vertical' reading between the particular and the general, the local and the global. (Friedman 2012, 517)

As Friedman – following James Clifford's assertion – summarizes, «the local ... is never purely local but always crossed by ongoing processes of hybridization produced through intercultural exchange» (ivi, 511). This common assumption is even more relevant in historically shared territories shaped by cultural interferences. East-Central Europe as «Mutter aller Geschichtsregionen» (Troebst 2010), as a historical in-between territory, where dislocating maps resulted in the re-framing of static spaces and their inhabitants, merges traces of different national, ethnic memories. According to Peter Zajac, the literary history of East-Central Europe could be interpreted as a «synoptic chart», rooted in an understanding of cartographic space «which is not fixed, does not have constant coordinates, but it is characterized by mobile, vibrating, pulsating movements and the possibilities for changing» (2003, 98). Having said that, following the principle that «there is no space independent from cultural techniques of ruling spaces» (Siegert 2011, 169), the map works as a medium and instrument of power of the cultural technology that produces «the territory in the service of the state as a political reality» (*ibidem*). In East-Central Europe «the movement of borders over people» (Brubaker 2015, 136) and the layering of maps as political representations resulted in the displacement and the re-framing of static spaces and their inhabitants³.

³ In Ádám Bodor's novel, *Az érsek látogatása* (1999, *The Archbishop's Visit*), this «static transformation» is ironically reflected as a natural phenomenon, also recalling Peter Zajac's meteorological term used as a metaphor for East-Central Europe: during the night, the city

Because of cultural interferences and juxtapositions, inner heterogeneity and hybridity can be seen as key terms in relation to East-Central European cultural space, where the «multilingual self-awareness» (Thomka 2018, 34-35)⁴ could probably be the most common human experience. According to Beáta Thomka, the organic unity of the nation, language and literature is denaturalised and restructured by new literary phenomena.

There are several circumstances that also influence the idea that a multitude of works, and literary opuses will find their own audience beyond the linguistic and national borders, moreover, they originate outside the original national languages and cultures. (2018, 48-49)

Contemporary authors from the region, such as Terézia Mora, Nicol Ljubić, Melinda Nadj Abonji, Alexandar Hemon, Saša Stanišić, Ismet Pricić or, according to Ilija Trojanow, such German Nobel-Prize writers as Elias Canetti, Günter Grass, Elfriede Jelinek and Herta Müller, are bi- or trilingual authors whose poetic languages create specific «commuting grammars» (Thomka 2018, 146) between different languages, transferring, juxtaposing, layering cultural worlds and social experiences. Consequently, their affiliation cannot be described simply with the help of a single national literary category. They could be analysed within multiple category systems. This multiple affiliation to different languages, cultures, and spaces – which does not mean the loss or the lack of any origin or entity/totality – allows for viewing the transferring aspect of these works as sites of intercultural negotiation between cultures and nations, and not as ones based on loss. Their inner linguistic otherness dislocates the traditional descriptive categories of literary history, as well as that of national literary canons. As Beáta Thomka claims: «The cultural homogeneity is counterbalanced by becoming multi-faceted, and the national literary horizons and hierarchy are replaced by a non-centered, networked, transcultural relationship system» (ivi, 19). Thus, national literary horizons and hierarchies could be

of Bogdanski Dolina is transferred to another country because the bordering river, Medvegyica changes its course.

⁴ The English translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

replaced by a non-centered, mobile system based on shared multilingual cultural experience.

Besides Beáta Thomka's research, Slovenian literary historian Marko Juvan also focuses on the aesthetic potentiality of multilingualism in East-Central Europe and outlines the theoretical possibilities of post-monolingualism. The aesthetic, philological and intertextual research on multilingualism seems to be also significant in the fields of German (see Yasemin Yildiz, Till Dembeck, David Gramling), Romance languages (see Rainier Grutman, Myriam Suchet, Werner Helmich) and English (Anjali Pandey). It is by creating local social and historical connections and contexts that the multilingualism of the East-Central European region could mark a new direction in the research of multilingualism that focuses on national, ethnic, class, gender intersectional, hierarchical, historical, and other stratifications, and configurations of social and historical localities⁵.

An inspiring re-conceptualization and methodology for researching multilingual literatures comes from a research project written by Francesca Orsini and her colleagues, entitled «Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies: For a New Approach to World Literature». According to the authors,

a located and multilingual approach shows that the imperial centre-colonial (or quasi-colonial) periphery axis was only one among the vectors of circulation, that European literature was also co-constituted through this axis rather than being a prior formation, and that language, or rather multilingualism, may indeed be a better starting point than the nation for comparative literature. (Laachir, Marzagora, Orsini 2018, 7)

Their «located perspectives» are focused on colonial areas (which also imply located theories) and their methodology could also be fruitful, on many levels, for East-Central European contexts. The heterogeneity and hybridity of the East-Central European cultural space shows parallel aspects

⁵ It is important to bring up in this context that, in a recently published Bloomsbury volume *Multilingual Literature as World Literature* (Hiddleston, Ouyang 2021), for example, this region seems to be completely absent from global circulation.

with the postcolonial discourse, as Peter Zajac argues (2009), however, I also believe that it is highly important to make a distinction with regard to East-Central Europe. Here, unlike in postcolonial areas, power relations have been inverted, with the impulse to seek satisfaction due to previous repression. National and ethnic memories, different from but impregnated with each other in the course of coexistence, are layered onto one another together with their power hierarchies and asymmetries that have also been altered as a result of changing geopolitical maps.

In this sense, an example could be the so-called transborder Hungarian literature phenomenon, comprising (minority) Hungarian literature in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia (the post-Yugoslav territories) and Ukraine. Transborder Hungarian literature itself, as a concept of literary history, is connected to the map «as a political reality» (Siebert 2011, 15), being rooted in the cartographic rearrangement of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920⁶. The dual national superiority rendered these literatures minor or even inferior for a long time, being seen as minor from the perspective of both the «host» state and that of Hungary. In the Communist era, up until 1989, the state borders were also the borders of literary history and the canon and transborder Hungarian literatures were mostly invisible in literary discourses in Hungary, being largely regarded as underground phenomena.

After 1989, the intensification of literary traffic and interaction implicitly brought about the unity of Hungarian literature. The hypothetical unity of Hungarian literature was created, and all available literatures started circulating in Hungary. (Before and after 1989, several authors migrated and moved to Hungary from transborder regions). In reality, this meant that books published in Hungary (or, more precisely, in Budapest), were more visible and canonised, and in this centre- or majority-focused practice, transborder Hungarian literatures, being peripheric, did not connect to each other in actual fact. Their only connection was *through* the center, or

⁶ The cartographic rearrangement of the Hungarian borders opened up a variety of fields of imaginary maps and (nationalist) projections or imagery, effective to this day. The intersections and divergences of the concepts of country border and homeland create the geographical space (especially in the case of Transylvania) as a symbolic texture «constructed by images and narratives» (Feischmidt 2005, 24), shaped by memories, fantasies, and myths.

only *to* the centre. The more invisible (non-canonized) part of transborder literature (and invisibility here is by no means a result of any aesthetic or poetical measuring criteria) is again a fertile terrain for the export of neo-nationalism. The revitalised urban vs. folk antagonism in contemporary neonationalist Hungary is being increasingly transported to transborder territories under the guise of a fabricated liberal-conservative opposition; in this way, the non-nationalist and the nativist is further antagonized, dividing every transborder community and literature from within. The new-fangled neonationalist, ethnicist political discourse and the newly founded literary institutions project the native, nationalist Hungarian as literary identity and value on less recognized authors, and this in turn becomes a strong identification discourse in such manipulated minority communities. At the same time, a detachment/distancing from the current Hungarian neonationalistic discourses and a reassessment of the multilingual localities and communities is more and more perceptible in the shared territories that formerly belonged to Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and are now part of Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, and the Ukraine, and which have significant Hungarian ethnic communities. For example, in Cluj-Napoca, Novi-Sad, or in Nitra new artistic associations are established, and international conferences and events are organized as systems of connections that differ conceptually and on the level of identity, and which markedly distance themselves from the nationalistic discourses propagated in Hungary and transported to transborder territories, subject to a process of colonization by Hungary by the means of a neonationalist, identitarian discourse, whereby Hungary exerts its «symbolic control» especially on Transylvania (Feischmidt 2005, 21). As Feischmidt argues, «creating the homeland in discourses about Transylvania is first of all not a unifying process but a symbolic extension of national existence to territories which are not part of the country in a political sense» (ivi, 22).

The «right to disengage» (Laachir, Marzagora, Orsini 2018, 4) from current Hungarian neonationalist discourse and to re-connect with other transborder Hungarian cultures as vernacular contexts is more and more detectable among the transborder Hungarian intelligentsia. The implicit and explicit multilingualism could be perceived as a *common but different* ground for transborder «Hungarian» literatures. In my research, I try to

re-conceptualise these literatures as multilingual, where the inter-lingual cultural locality is created by shared discordant languages.

Focusing on multilingualism as an aesthetic «location» of the literature, where the local appears as multilingual, I try to open up the literature of shared territories *for multiple (national) affiliations*⁷. Thus, the inherent multilingualism of the Hungarian «periphery», on the one hand, could re-frame and deconstruct the national as a homogeneous entity, since transborder Hungarian literature, conceptualised as multilingual, undermines the monolingualism of the national literature, and, on the other hand, it could create openness for connecting and interacting with other multilingual literatures, literatures with different inner accents, dialects. The multilingual aspect as an immanent component of literary fictions «gives back» the literary texts to the aesthetic without dissolving their local affiliation. The latter is created as poetic: through the interaction and the use of different languages, dialects, and linguistic references. Furthermore, multilingualism, as an aesthetic potential, creates the «location» or de-location of the literary texts and, as Oana Sabo points out, «multilingual aesthetic is thus linked to the destabilisation of fixed, monolithic viewpoints and the blurring of gendered, linguistic, and canonical boundaries» (Sabo 2014, 106).

2. 1989 – Romanian-Hungarian Contact Narratives

In my ongoing research⁸, I explore the possibilities of multilingualism in two ways: on the one hand, I examine the way in which Romanian and Hungarian texts interact with each other, creating «contact narratives»⁹

⁷ An actual example for double affiliation is, when Transylvanian-born writers like Ádám Bodor, György Dragomán and Zsolt Láng appear as part of «Romanian Literature as World Literature», in a recently published book (see Balázs 2017, 157-174). In the conceptualization of this book, the inner and inter-national boundaries are re-examined and opened up for connections: within the framework of historical and geopolitical co-existence, these Hungarian writers are perceived as part of Romanian (World) Literature, at least in the global circulation of Romanian literature in English.

⁸ For further details see: <<https://www.hf.uio.no/ilos/english/people/aca/monikda/>>.

⁹ Cf. «narratives that bring into relation specific and distinct historical experiences and discourses» (Kaakinen 2017, 23).

about the 1989 regime change and, on the other hand, the way in which literary texts are created as inherently multilingual.

The 1989 regime change in Eastern Europe could be perceived as a series of events on the 'periphery' (viewed from Western Europe) which had an effect on the 'centre'. For a short time, these events were in the focus of the global world. At the same time, the historical event bridges the national (language) boundaries: novels written in Hungarian and in Romanian come across as «contact narratives» (Kaakinen 2017, 23) through intersecting personal formations and viewpoints, and they jointly create the common and shared past as the Romanian locality. In this sense, they enable another conceptualization of literature, one that questions the evidence of «the nation as a self-contained unit for literary production» (Domínguez, Neumann 2018, 209).

My comparative corpus for this purpose is: Dumitru Țepeneag: *Hotel Europa* (1996; *Hotel Europa*, translated by Patrick Camiller, 2010); Andrea Tompa: *A hóhér háza* (2010, rev. ed. 2015; *The Hangman's House*, translated by Bernard Adams, 2021); Bogdan Suceavă: *Noaptea când cineva a murit pentru tine* (2010, *The Night when Somebody Died for You*); Zsigmond Sándor Pap: *Semmi kis életek* (2011, *Insignificant Lives*); Zsolt Láng: *Bestiarium Transylvaniae. A föld állatai* (2011, *Bestiarium Transylvaniae: The Animals of Earth*); György Dragomán: *Máglya* (2014; *The Bone Fire*, translated by Otilie Mulzet, 2020); Radu Pavel Gheo: *Disco Titanic* (2016); Gábor Vida: *Egy dadogás története* (2017; *Story of a Stammer*, translated by Jozefina Komporaly, forthcoming); Farkas Király: *Sortűz* (2018, *Barrage*).

Reading side by side these contemporary Romanian and Hungarian novels which deal with the events of 1989, their common locality becomes evident; the experience of the totalitarian regime and the fall of the regime as a common ground «forge a sense of locality» (Domínguez, Neumann 2018, 209). They map fragments of the common past shared in different languages. Reading these novels alongside one another, another aspect becomes obvious: not only the Hungarian novels but also those written in Romanian are created as multilingual worlds. Radu Pavel Gheo's *Disco Titanic* (2016) is located in the multi-ethnic city of Timișoara (Temesvár in Hungarian, Temeswar in German); Bogdan Suceavă's *The Night when Somebody Died for You* (2010) focuses on mandatory military draft in the Communist era. For young people the army service was also a site for contact

with other ethnicities living within the country and with other Romanians from different parts of the country speaking different dialects. (The novels of Farkas Király and Gábor Vida are also at least partly set during the era of mandatory military service).

Multilingualism as «the coexistence of different belief systems and forms of knowledge» (Doloughan 2009, 40) is developed on many levels in Tepeneag's novel. Through metaleptic poetics, *Hotel Europa* (1996) combines and interweaves the postmodern auto-poetic self-reflective narrative style with the conditions of realism of an Eastern-European post-1989 vagabond-journey in Western Europe. A very unique aspect of this novel reconfigures multilingualism from a 'class' perspective, seeing that all the gangsters and prostitutes of the Eastern European underworld that follow the young adult character as a network are multilingual, they speak several languages with post-Soviet accents.

The historical events of 1989 and their formative role in the young female and male narrators' or characters' personal/individual formation link these novels to the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, giving it a new function. In Mikhail Bakhtin's definition, it is a genre of «mastering historical time» and of framing «the new sphere of historical existence», thus it is also a genre which «compromises among distinct worldviews» (Moretti 2000, vii and xii). If we read these novels within the narrative frameworks of the *Bildungsroman*, the role of the (historical) event in the processes of personal formation becomes visible; however, the result is not a narrative form typical of the *Bildungsroman*. The events of 1989 play the role of a liminal event in the characters' bildung process on a personal, though not on a social level. The plots are either placed in the midst of the events happening on the streets (see Bogdan Suceavă's and Farkas Király's novels), or more often the events are contextualized in a broader period before and after 1989 (see the other novels). This second aspect reveals the overlapping character of the novels; the event can be seen as the border between periods and also as a connecting point between before and after. This interwoven aspect of the historical event in process also reflects the «face» of the event. Namely, the event becomes visible from the perspectives of different personal life stories. These novels re-create the «nature» of the event as a multiplication and intersection of several personal and power viewpoints. These novels

are created as a site for a cross-section of viewpoints, where the narrator(s) are navigating like a handheld camera capturing non-linear, fragmented occurrences, memories, personal shards, and reflections¹⁰.

The historical event narrated as a personal, even subjective event, links the language of literature with the event that occurred, without objectifying language (which was a characteristic of social-realist literary modes). The generational correlation (with the exception of Tepeneag, every writer was born in Romania around the seventies) could be interpreted as an exploration of language for an appropriate, authentic literary language connected to history and society. And the *Bildungsroman*'s master narrative is re-invented as a liminal genre between art and the historical event. On the personal level of the characters, these novels create 1989 as a landmark event in their personal developmental process. Indoctrinations, memories of socialism are implemented in non-linear, self-reflexive narratives as shards, realisms in narratives of private memory.

In Andrea Tompa's, György Dragomán's and Zsolt Láng's novels, the main viewpoint is embodied by a young girl. An interesting aspect becomes visible when we compare the young female characters' actions with the young male soldiers' viewpoints in Bogdan Suceavă's and Farkas Király's novels: namely, the girls appear as free agents in the streets in the midst of the events, moreover, they can even be portrayed the rebellious hero (as in Dragoman's novel). They try to influence and shape the evolution of the event personally. The historical event, being incorporated through the female agents, also balances the conception of history as a male event. Compared to the girls' perspective, the male soldiers' viewpoints are more insecure, fragmented and ultimately disappointed. In both Király's and Suceavă's novels the chaotic event accidentally «traps» innocent victims, close to the narrators' friends. This similarity in Hungarian and Romanian novels also reveals the common collective male traumas which the soldiers suffered in the middle of the events. (In Radu Pavel Gheo's novel, the young male character is also wounded).

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of the events of 1989 in Romania in visual culture and in re-enactments see Dánél (2017, 95-131).

What all these novels have in common is how they describe pre-1989 childhoods and pre-1989 conditions distinctly but definitely as a common institutionalisation of personal lives. The narratives can be seen as a countermeasure, an image breaker of visual and other practices of deep communist indoctrination even at the bodily level. These novels can be understood 'as a decomposition and transformation of the Communist (state-socialist) ideological conditionings and inscribed fantasies, and as a search for self-expression through language'.

In this sense the most powerful example is Andrea Tompa's first novel *The Hangman's House* (first Hungarian edition 2010, revised edition 2015), which is at the same time a poetic example of the inner heterogeneity of the Hungarian literary language. In its 38 chapters, every chapter is one single, gigantic, and fluid sentence, saturated by Romanian, English, Hebrew, German words, and sentences. The genre of the *Bildungsroman* is de- and recomposed as a texture of passage where different linguistic and cultural layers, political and ideological structures are intermingled and transposed, and in which one young girl attempts to pass into the new future. In the novel, the events of 1989 play an essential role; the novel is framed by two chapters, which are related to the events of 1989 in Cluj and Timișoara.

For the young female protagonist, time with a future aspect – essential for the bildung process – begins with the historical events of 1989. The internal chapters are characterised by «liquid, boundless time» (Andrea Tompa) without the sense of mobility and future. The chapter-long sentences can themselves be considered as provocative rebellious poetic performances against the dictatorial regime with its closed, bounded space and time, which, at the same time, can be understood as a form of structural violence on Hungarian grammar. The novel's world is a multilingual space in which the characters' identities are negotiated through inter-lingual and intermedial encounters.

The chapter «The Mouth» recalls and re-enacts the propaganda tradition when the Romanian dictator's face was put together as a gigantic puzzle picture formed by children. In the following passage there are two (or more) cases of ekphrasis of the pictures or the moving «gigantic face» of the «One-ear». This is the way the invisible dictator is called in «his» multiple, remediated images in the novel. For a more intense experiencing of the flow

and the poetics of the chapter-long sentences and the dynamic of the girl's self-understanding process I cite a longer quote here in Hungarian and in the translation produced by Bernard Adams.¹¹

What part of him are you? asked Csabi Ürögdi, blue with cold outside the children's clinic at the 25 trolleybus stop, because they would go the same way to the Györgyfalvi district, but no trolley had come in half an hour [...] *I don't know*, the Girl answered uncertainly, watching for the buses on Monostori út, but there was nothing coming, then glancing doubtfully at little Csabi, *Aren't we letters?*, [...] *What colour were you wearing?* asked Csabi, because in the stadium they'd not been together [...] (the senior pupils also were said to bring in *pálinka* and tea with rum in it) – led them up into the stand on the south side, where they had to turn on the shout of '*La dreapta!*' (Right turn!); [...] the pig-eyed history teacher Ghiță stood down below on the edge of the pitch on the top level of a podium fished out of the store, marked with a 1 and intended for winners, and howled into an aluminium megaphone, trying as he did so to turn over folded diagrams in the icy wind that blew from the side, and the teachers in charge of the classes and groups at the ends repeated the words of command: this was the sign that they had to turn all together in four stages, and those in charge clapped their hands eight times: left foot outwards turn, right foot beside it (so far a half-turn), left foot outwards turn, again right foot beside it, and by now they were facing the other way), only all this had to be done on a fixed, plastic seat on which there was hardly room for their boots, it was next to impossible to turn, so somebody was always falling off or late because the seats were wet and slippery, those that were badly secured wobbled, somebody must have taken the screws out – *One side's blue, the other side's red*, she replied, and thought that it might be as well to start walking home, there must be a power cut because nothing was coming up the hill, although several people were waiting, but perhaps they were queueing for the shop behind the bus stop? – *Red? There's no red*, said Csabi firmly, and added *I've got black and white: white is the letter on one side, black is his hair on the other*, and he began to blow on his red hands, *Aren't we letters on both sides? That's what Year Ten told me*, asked the Girl, because no one had officially told

¹¹ To display the facing text, set "double page view" (on Adobe Acrobat enable also "show cover").

Te miye vagy?, kérdezte Ürögdi Csabi lilára fagyva a gyerekklínika előtt, a 25-ös troli megállójában, mert egyirányba mentek volna a Györgyfalvi negyedbe, de a troli már fél órája nem jött [...] *Nem tudom*, válaszolta bizonytalanul a lány a Monostori úton a buszokat lesve, de semmi nem járt, aztán gyanakodva a kis prücsök Csabira pillantott: *Nem betűk vagyunk?*, [...] *Milyen színű a ruhád?*, kérdezte Csabi, mert a stadionban már nem kerültek egymás mellé, [...] (állítólag a a nagyok is hoztak rumos teát meg pálinkát) – feltelretek őket a stadion nézőterére, a déli oldalra, ahol *La dreapta!* kiáltásra jobbra kellett fordulniuk: [...] a disznószemű történelemtanár, Ghiță, lent, a pálya szélére állított, raktárból előhalászott dobogó legmagasabb, győzteseknek szánt, 1-essel jelölt fokán alumíniumtölcsérbe üvöltött, közben kihajtott táblázatokat próbált lapozni az oldalról vágó jeges szélben, a sor két végén lévő osztály-és csoportparancsnokok pedig elismételték a vezényszavakat: ez volt a jelzés arra, hogy négy lépésből, ütemre fordulni kell, a felelősök pedig négyet tapsoltak: bal láb nyit, jobb láb zár (eddig a félfordulat), bal láb nyit, megint jobb zár (mostanra háttal állnak), csakhogy mindezt egy műanyag, rögzített széken kellett végrehajtani, ahol a bakancsaik is nehezen fértek el, megfordulni szinte képtelenség volt, így aztán valaki mindig leesett vagy elkésett a fordulással, mert a nedves ülés csúszott, a rosszul rögzített székek pedig lipinkáztak, meg kell alul húzni a csavarokat, *A ruhám egyik oldala kék, a másik piros*, válaszolta a lány, és arra gondolt, hogy jobb lenne gyalog hazaindulni, biztos áramszünet van, mert fölfele sem megy semmi, bár többen várnak, de lehet, hogy ők inkább a megálló mögötti bolthoz állnak sorban, *Piros? Piros nincs*, jelentette ki határozottan Csabi, és hozzátette: *Nekem fekete és fehér: a fehér a betű az egyik oldalon, a fekete meg a haja a másikon*, és lehelni kezdte vörös kezét, *Nem mind a két oldalon betűk vagyunk?*, kérdezte a lány, *Nekem azt mondták a tizedikesek*, ugyanis hivatalosan senki nem tájékoztatta

them what they were portraying, all that they knew was that they were preparing for a celebration, and it was a great honour and distinction for the whole school that they had been chosen, and so the Girl hadn't thought about what the colours meant, she'd just been waiting every day to go home – *Shall we go?* she suggested, because she and Csabi often walked home. – *Yes, let's, there's nothing coming. At one time we're white letters on blue, then the other side's the picture. Which side are you on most?* he asked – *You mean, facing the stadium? The blue. Where are you going?* she asked, because in the meantime she'd decided to go to Grandmother's instead, where there was always some lunch left over, and now she might get a hot milky coffee as well, but Mother wouldn't be home until evening, she'd said she was working out of town – *I don't know, don't mind, I'm not going home* – replied Csabi, *I'm with the white more, I'm the hat on the letter ă, you know, right at the very top, because the side of the stand's been extended to make room for the whole thing, the words and the picture, they say the other stadium was higher than the Kolozsvár one, they've welded bars onto the top railings – they just hung about for two days while that was done, couldn't even go into the dressing rooms – then the bars have been supported from underneath, little planks put over them, and we stand on those, there's only a rope behind us, and the shortest and lightest in the whole school have been chosen, there are some fourth formers as well, they haven't put anybody smaller up there because a stupid third former fell off, and the whole thing wobbles like this when we get up and turn – Csabi demonstrated with his red hands – everybody shakes, and they've put the smallest up there in case the whole thing collapses under the big ones, you see, we're very high up, makes you shit yourself, you can see the cross in Főtér, the whole of Fellegvár, the Kerekdomb and the station, the Szamos bridge as well, Donát út, the Kányafő, the Monostor, the cemetery, the covered-up lions on the Roman theatre, I'd never seen the town from so high up, and you can't hear what Ghița's shouting down there either – because it was he, the history teacher, who was directing the proceedings from down there – we've got Kriszti on the end of the row, he's really shit scared, feels sick all the time, so I'm the very highest of the letters, on the first ă in 'Trăiască' (Long live), and when we turn I'm his hair, see! when I've got my back turned and I look down I shit myself! and when we turn round there's the picture, then your back's black or white, you're hair, face, eye, but there's no other colour, I've not heard of any red, d'you want one? And he took out a pack of Albanian Apollonias and offered it, and now they were passing the Ethnographic Museum in Unió utca, and Csabi's mother knew that he smoked and only laughed – *Are you daft? Here in the street? Here and now?* because before the holiday there were more police about, but you had to look out for adults as well,*

őket arról, hogy mit ábrázolnak, csak annyit tudtak, hogy ünnepségre készülnek, nagy megtiszteltetés és elismerés az egész iskolásnak, hogy éppen őket választották ki, ezért a lány sem gondolkodott a színek jelentésén, csak az várta mindennap, hogy mikor mehet végre el, *Nem indulunk?*, ajánlotta, mert gyakran jártak haza Csabival gyalog, *De, menjünk, nem jön semmi. Egyszer kék alapon betűk vagyunk, aztán a másik oldal a kép. Te melyik oldalon vagy többet?*, érdeklődött a fiú, *Mármint a stadionnal szemben? A késsel. Meddig mész?*, kérdezte a lány, mert közben eldöntötte, hogy inkább a nagymamájához megy, ahol mindig van egy kis ebédmaradék, és éppen talán egy forró tejeskávét is kaphat, a mama úgyis csak estére jön csak, falura megy dolgozni, azt mondta, *Nem tudom, mindegy, haza megyek*, válaszolta Csabi, *Én a fehérrel vagyok többet. Én vagyok a kalap az «ä» betűn, tudod ott fent, a legtetején, mert meghosszabbították a stadion nézőtéri oldalát, hogy kiférjen az egész felirat, az írás meg a kép is, a többi stadion állítólag magasabb volt, mint a kolozsvári, rudakat hegesztettek a felső korláthoz mi két napig csak lógtunk, álltunk lent, amíg szereltek, az öltözőkbe sem volt szabad bemenni, a rudakat aztán alulról kitámasztották, tettek közé kis deszkákat, azokon állunk, mögöttünk csak kötel van, és az egész iskolából kiválasztották a legalacsonyabbakat és legkönnyebbeket, vannak negyedikese is, azoknál kisebbeket nem raktak, megy egy mutuj harmadikos leesett, táti, az egész így inog, amikor felmegyünk és fordulunk – és Csabi rezegett a vörös kezét –, mindenki reszket, a legkisebbek kerültek oda, nehogy leszakadjon az egész tákolmány a nagyok alatt, érted, nagyon magasak vagyunk, be kell szarni, látni lehet a főtéri keresztet is, az egész Fellegvárt, a Kerekdombot és az állomást, meg a Szamos-hídat is, a Donát utat, a Kányafőt, a Monostort, a temetőt, a befedett oroszlanokat is a román színházon, még sohasem láttam ilyen magasról a várost, nem is halljuk, hogy mit üvölt ott lenni Ghiță – mert ő volt a történelemtanár, aki odalent, a mélyben vezényelt –, nálunk Kriszti van a sor végén, szegény nagyon be van tojva, folyton hányingere van, szóval én vagyok a legmagasabban a betűk közül, a «Trăiască»-ban (Éljen) az első kalap, amikor megfordulunk, haj vagyok, te!, amikor háttal vagyok és nézek le, fosok be!, amikor háttal vagyunk akkor van a kép, akkor vagy fekete a hátad, vagy fehér, haj vagy arc, szem, de más szín nincs, pirosról nem hallottam, kérsz egyet? – és Csabi kivesz egy doboz albán Apollóniát, azzal kínálja a lányt, már a Néprajzi Múzeumnál jártak az Unió utcában, Csabi anyukája tudta, hogy cigizik, és a lány csak nevet rajta, *Hülye vagy? Itt az utcán akarsz? Pont most?* – mert az ünnep előtt több volt a rendőr, de a felnőttektől is kellett félni, hogy*

they might note your identity number, [...] *How many reds do you think there were? How many piles when you gave them in?* Csabi asked suddenly, as if he'd just remembered that at the end of the practice the overalls were stacked in piles of ten, and he stubbed out the cigarette on the wall of a house because his hand was frozen by then, and put the long butt back in the box. *Look, I'm going to have to go to my mother's office, see you,* said the Girl, and turned abruptly on her heel, but she didn't make for her mother's office but, although it was out of the way, for her grandparents', because it has suddenly dawned on her that she could only be his mouth: the fleshy lips, drawn into a smile on the front pages of textbooks, the blood-red cherry lips on the classroom wall above the double poster, the smiling lips on the holiday front page of the newspapers – his teeth never showed in the smile – the mouth that ranted long speeches on the television, she was the mouth in the gigantic picture made up of another school's worth of children, which in birthday greeting would turn into a sudden, smiling portrait on the south side of the stadium, the mouth which would churn out catch-phrases and cheer itself when the tiny original of the picture descended from the helicopter at the birthday celebrations in the middle of the gravel-strewn, red-carpeted stadium, and a chosen boy and girl would run forward and happily greet him – the best class in the school – and school governors had come in Pioneer uniform on the first days and practised in the dressing room – with flowers, salt and a huge, gleaming plaited sweetbread that no mouth would touch, step onto the edge of the rolled-out carpet, like the little ones, the Falcons of the Fatherland, in just blouses and skirts, and a bigger pupil would declaim enthusiastically into the microphone the poem entitled *Ce-ți doresc eu ție, dulce Românie* – What do I wish you, sweet Romania – the rest would sing and, standing on the plastic seats of the stadium, would suddenly turn round on the word of command, and then the picture would appear [...] *Now I'm his disgusting mouth,* had suddenly came into her head, and she felt sick as she thought of herself and the overalls that she'd not long taken off, she felt as if cold, drooling lips were kissing her defenceless body, as if this huge frothing mouth were vomiting white, foaming letters over her, and she was becoming a bit of living, loathsome, pink flesh, torn off and displayed to public view, because *I am him, or vice versa, he is me:* I am his flesh, inseparably conjoined, he's taking root in me so that I shan't be able to wash him off, and his likeness has been burned into me like a brand, I am him, or more precisely we are all him, because we're all stood in nice, tidy order and we turn on the word of command and we're him: but he himself doesn't exist anywhere, nobody ever sees

felírják a karszámukat, [...] *Hány piros van szerinted? Hány kupac, amikor leadjátok?*, kérdezte hirtelen Csabi, mint akinek valami eszébe jutott, mert tízes kupacokban rakták le a ruhákat a próba végén, *Nem sok, kék sokkal több van, kék rengeteg van*, jegyezte meg a főtér sarkán a lány, *Ja, akkor tudom*, mondta Csabi, és egy házfalon eloltotta a cigijét, mert már ráfagyott a keze, a hosszú csikket visszatette a dobozba, *Figyelj, fel kell menjek anyámhoz az irodába, szerusz*, szólt a lány, és hirtelen sarkon fordult, de nem az anyja irodája felé indult, hanem a nagyanyjéék felé, igaz, kerülővel, mert hirtelen rájött, hogy akkor ő nem lehet más, csak a szája: a húsos, mosolyra húzott ajak a tankönyvek első oldalán, a vérpiros cseresznyeajak az osztályterem falán a dupla tábla fölött, a mosolygó ajak az újság ünnepi címlapján – a fogak a mosolyból sosem látszanak ki –, a hosszú beszédeket harsogó száj a televízióban, ő a száj egy többiskolányi gyerekből kirakott óriásképből, amely a születésnapj jókívánságokból hirtelen mosolygós arcképpé fordul majd át a stadion déli oldalán, a száj, amely jelszavakat skandál, és maga is éljenez majd, amikor a képmás kicsiny eredetije születésnapj ünnepségén helikopteren leszáll a kavicsal felszórta, vörös futószőnyeggel is leterített stadion közepére, egy kiválasztott fiú és lány szalad elé és boldogan köszönti – az éltanuló osztály- és iskolaparancsnokok pionírruhában jöttek az első napokban, és az öltözőben gyakoroltak –, virággal, sóval és hatalmas, fényes fonott kaláccsal, amit száj nem érint majd, lépnek a leterített szőnyeg szélére, akárcsak a kicsik, a haza sólymai egy szál ingben és szoknyában, egy nagyobb gyerek majd lelkesen elmondja a *Ce-ți doresc eu ție, dulce Românie* (Mit kívánok néked, édes Romániám) című verset a mikrofonba, a többiek énekelnek, és a stadion műanyag székein állva vezényszóra hirtelen mind megfordulnak, és akkor előtűnik a kép, [...] *Most meg az undorító szája vagyok*, jutott eszébe és öklendezve gondolt önmagára meg a ruhára, amit csak nemrég vetett le, úgy érezte, mintha védtelen testét hideg, nyálas ajkak csókolgatnák, fehér, fröcsögő betűket hányva ki rá ez a hatalmas habzó száj, ő maga pedig egy darab élő, undorító, rózsaszín hús lenne kiszakadva, közszemlére hajítva, mert *Én vagyok ő, vagy fordítva, ő én*: a húsa vagyok, elválaszthatatlanul összenőve vele, belém bújik, hogy ne tudjam lemosni sem magamról, a képmását mint szégyenbélyeget rám sütötték, én vagyok ő, pontosabban mi mind ő vagyunk, mert együtt, szép fegyvermezett rendbe állítva és vezényszóra fordulva vagyunk ő: hiszen ő maga nem létezik sehol, senki soha nem látta, de nem: Tátá látta, és Pista

him, never: T tata's seen him and my uncle Pista as well, they've sat with him at meetings, but now he's just pictures, pictures, pictures, not a person, just pictures, something that we've jointly made up and unknowingly formed from our bodies [...] *I'm his mouth, I've got to stand still, like a statue, the lips will move with me, open and swallow me, or open to speak and speak through me, his words will start to pour forth because there are no others, only his screeching voice, because it is I, I, I in my blood-red overalls that keep him alive, [...].* (Tompa 2021, 22-29, italics in original)

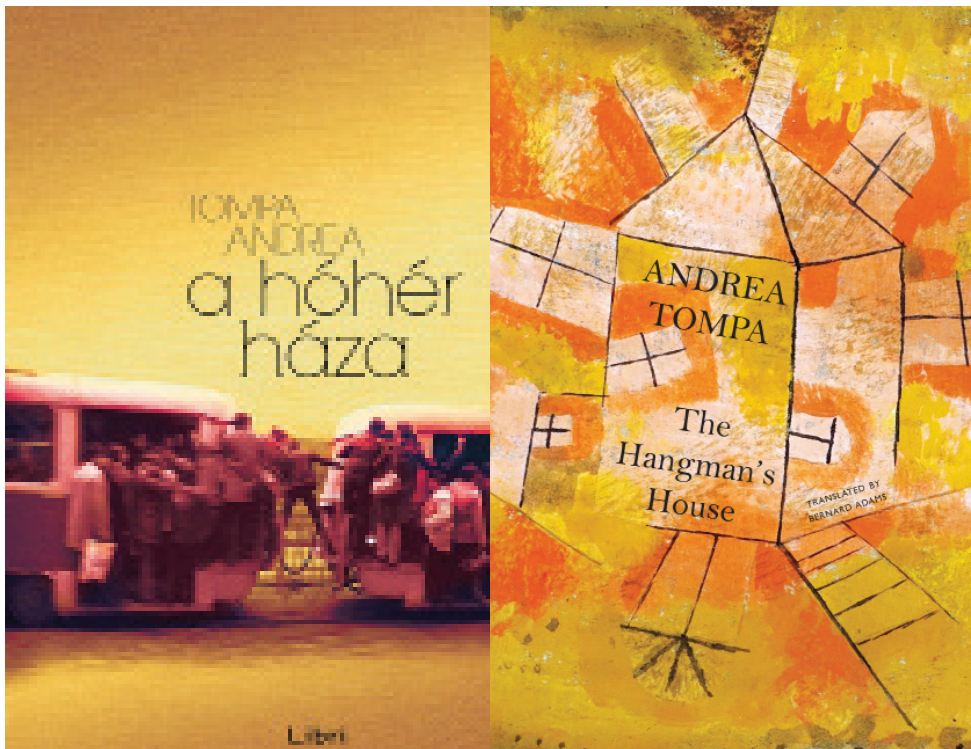


Figure 1 – Detail of the cover of the revised Hungarian edition of Andrea Tompa's novel (2015).

Figure 2 – Detail of the cover of the first English edition of Tompa's volume (2021). Photo by the author of the article.

bátyám is, valaha együtt ültek a gyűléseken, de most már csak kép, kép, kép, nem ember, hanem kép, amit mi együtt találtunk ki, és öntudatlanul rakjuk ki a testünkbe, [...] *A szája vagyok, mozdulatlanul kell állnom, mint egy szobor, ha mozdulok, az ajak is mozdul velem, kinyílik és felfal engem, vagy szóra nyílik és beszélni fog általam, ömleni kezdenek a szavai, mert más szavak nincsenek is, csak az ő rikácsoló hangja, mert én, én tartom életben a vérpiros ruhámmal, [...]*. (Tompa 2015, 29-38)

The description intertwines the tangible, traumatic and sensual inner perspective of the child with the panoptic, downward-looking view. This process of puzzle-making objectifies the children's bodies that it uses to create its picture. In the chapter-length sentences, Hungarian and Romanian words and sentences are also intertwined: they depict a multilingual city and co-existence from the inner viewpoint of the Hungarian girl. On the one hand, the Romanian language functions as a medium of power, as an instrumentalised language of propaganda, of command, and of dehumanization, as seen, for example, in the command *La dreapta!* (Right turn!). Mihai Eminescu's poem «Ce-ți doresc eu ție, dulce Românie» (What do I wish you, sweet Romania) also appears as an instrumentalised element in a propaganda show. Csabi, the Hungarian boy is objectified in the big propaganda picture as a specific Romanian diacritic, «the hat on the letter ă» he is «the very highest [tallest] of the letters, on the first ă in 'Trăiască' (Long live)».

Meanwhile, the Romanian equivalent of the word 'father' appears in the text – referring to the girl's own father – but written with Hungarian diacritics: «Tátá». This Romanian-Hungarian denomination cannot be reduced, transcribed, or translated either to the Hungarian 'apa' or to Romanian 'tată', the latter word being expropriated in the Communist era by propaganda language which called the dictator the father of all Romanian children¹².

¹² For this connotation see a fragment from Herta Müller's book *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* which stages propagandistic indoctrination. By repeating such basic sentences, the instrumentalized language appears as a medium of the ideological conditioning of children. And the diabolical efficiency consists in blending the images of the family and the country. The extension of the private images (house, family, parents) to the non-private (country, leaders) results in the suspension of the private as private. See: «Amalie hängt die

In this cultural and intertextual context, through the interaction of the Hungarian and Romanian stresses and diacritics the word 'Tátá' in Tompa's novel looks like a *re-familiarisation* of the Romanian word 'tată' in the personal relationship between the Hungarian daughter and her father. The way the word sounds lays claims simultaneously to two languages: Spelt like this, it also signals the interaction of the Hungarian and Romanian diacritics and accents: the long Hungarian 'á' in the Romanian word conjures up the long-accented Romanian 'a'. The inner disruption and split sound of the word 'Tátá' also performs and mediates the disruption (or dissensus) between the written and the pronounced word. The simultaneity of the disruption and interaction of the two written-verbally uttered languages create a space for an intimate reading for those who are connected to these languages, to Romanian-Hungarian interacted accents¹³.

Landkarte Rumäniens an die Wand. "Alle kinder wohnen in Wohnblocks oder in Häusern", sagt Amalie. "Jedes Haus hat Zimmer. Alle Häuser bilden zusammen ein grosse Haus ist unser Land. Unser Vaterland." Amalie zeigt auf die Landkarte. "Das ist unser Vaterland", sagt sie. Sucht mit der Fingerspitze die schwarzen Punkte auf der Karte. "Das sind die Städte sind die Zimmer dieses grossen Hauses, unseres Landes. In unserem Häusern wohnen unser Vater und unsere Mutter. Sie sind unsere Eltern. Jedes Kind hat seine Eleter. So wie unser Vater im Haus, in dem wir wohnen, der Vater is, ist Genosse Nicolae Ceaușescu der Vater unseres Landes. Und so wie unsere Mutter im Haus, in dem wohnen, unsere Mutter is, ist Genossin Elena Ceaușescu die Mutter unseres Landes. Genosse Nicolae Ceaușescu is der Vater aller Kinder. Und Genossin Elena Ceaușescu ist die Mutter aller Kinder. Alle Kinder lieben den Genossen und die Genossin, weil sie ihre Eltern sind."» (1986, 61-62). English translation: «Amalie hangs the map of Romania on the wall. "All children live in the blocks of flats or in houses," says Amalie. "Every house has rooms. All the houses together make one big house. This big house is our contry. Our fatherland." Amalie points at the map. "This is our Fatherland," she says. With her fingertip she searches for the black dots on the map. "These are the towns of our Fatherland," says Amalie. "The towns are the rooms of this big house, our country. Our fathers and mothers live in our houses. They are our parents. Every child has its parents. Just as tha father in the house in which we live is our father, so Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu is the father of our country. And just the mother in the house in which we live is our mother, so Comrade Elena Ceaușescu is the mother of our country. Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu is the father of all the children. And Comrade Elena Ceaușescu is the mother of all the children. All the children love Comrade Nicolae and Comrade Elena, because they are their parents"» (Müller 2015, 59-60).

¹³ The novel does not exclude its non-local readers. The inter-lingual character of the novel as a «destabilization of fixed, monolithic viewpoints» (Sabo 2014, 106) is connected to other disruptions. Such a disruption can be found between the institutionalized, regulated

In the novel's world we can detect the girl's *bildung* as a struggle between elements of society as fake pictures, propaganda images and commands written even in bodily exercise. What the novel explores and suggests, not so much as a message, but as a method in my interpretation, is that 'the *bildung* process is actually a de-formation process, a self-alienation from the interiorized dictatorial conditions inscribed in the body'. On the other hand, *The Hangman's House* gives intimate examples for such multilingual characters who – because of the nature of the shared discordant language – speak all languages with an accent, including their own mother tongue.

3. Hungarian Literature as a Medium of Multilingual Cultural Memory

Ádám Bodor's first novel, *Sinistra körzet* (1992, *The Sinistra Zone*, translated by Paul Olchváry, 2013), is set somewhere in a Romanian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Moldavian border zone that appears to be an interface between real and imaginary worlds.

This secret vista – a crag that jutted out slightly beyond the spruces and firs – formed a rocky part of the crest of Pop Ivan Mountain. From it you could see far across the border to the bluish, rolling, forested hills of Ruthenia. Dark smoke rose from behind the furthest hills, perhaps from as far away as the open country beyond. As if night were already coming on, a purplish curtain draped the horizon to the east, but it faded with the rising sun.

When, hours later, the valley filled with the opalescent lights of afternoon, the forest commissioner packed away his binoculars and picked up his hat: the reconnaissance had come to an end.

body and the sensitive body. By keeping orders turning left and right, the trained body «acts and pushes» the protagonist for long period in self-accusation when she faces her father's death, who is probably not dead yet, but she turns out without calling the ambulance. After this tragic turn, she heads off, running in a ritualistic fashion in order to find or get back her own body. The body instructed to turn left and right, becomes a site for expressing personal guilt, while the turning itself emerges as a language/body of self-discovery. Meanwhile, the trope of running laps aids the transformation and reclamation of the previously over-regulated body...

Whether he had in fact caught a glimpse of what he sought on the slopes across the way – of the waxwing or some other sign of the Tungusic Flu approaching from bush to bush – this was to forever remain his secret; nor did I ever figure out why he had taken me – a simple harvester of wild fruits, and a stranger at that – along to the Ukrainian border that day. (Bodor 2013, 4)¹⁴

In the fragment, beside the Ukrainian border there also appear «the hills of Ruthenia» («a ruszin erdővidék»), featuring here as a historical marker in geography. The Ukrainian border and the Ruthenian hills both signal existing geo-political entities, but in a very different way. The history of the Ruthenians as an ethnic group without an independent state renders the border of the Ukrainian nation state a historical construct in this stratified, mobile historical perspective. Ruthenian or Ruthenia signals its difference from the Ukrainian border as a contemporary geo-political entity, even contesting it, since Rusyns are a stateless ethnicity and in a historically controversial relation with the Ukraine as a nation state¹⁵. According to Astrid Erll, «literary

¹⁴ See Hungarian original: «A fenyvesből éppen csak kibukkanó bérc már a Pop Ivan gerincéhez tartozott, messzire el lehetett róla látni a határon túlra, a ruszin erdővidék egymást követő kék vonulataira. A legutolsó halmok mögül, talán már a róna messziségéből sötét füst emelkedett, az égbolt nagy részét keleten, mintha máris az éjszaka közelednék, lila függöny takarta. Ahogy a nap emelkedett, tompultak a távoli színek, s amikor a völgyek kiteltek a délután opálos fényeivel, az erdőbiztos eltette messzelátóját, vette a sapkáját, jelezve, hogy a szemle véget ért.

Soha nem derült ki, megpillantotta-e a túloldali lankákon azt, amit keresett, a csonttollút vagy a bokorról bokorra közeledő tunguz nátha valami más jelét, és az sem, miért pont engem, az egyszerű erdei gyümölcs-gyűjtőgető idegent vitt magával aznap az ukrán határra» (Bodor 1992, 5-6).

¹⁵ See: «The Rusyns – also known as Carpatho-Rusyns, Carpatho-Russians, Carpatho-Ukrainians, Lemkos, Rusnaks, Rutheninas, and Uhro-Rusyns – are a Slavic people living in central Europe. Their homeland, Carpathian Rus', is according to present-day boundaries located within the borders of four states: Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Romania. Carpathian Rus' forms a contiguous territorial unit whose numerically dominant population has traditionally been of Rusyn nationality. Other names have been used [...] to designate Rusyn-inhabited territory in the various parts of Carpathian Rus'; namely, the Lemko Region in Poland, the Prešov Region in Slovakia, Subcarpathian Rus' in Ukraine, and Maramureş in Romania. There are also a few compact Rusyn settlements in present-day northeastern Hungary and in the Vojvodina region of Yugoslavia, and communities of Rusyn immigrants and their descendants are found in the Czech Republic, Canada, and

works can display and juxtapose divergent and contested memories and create mnemonic multiperspectivity» (2011, 151). The English translation 'motivates' the reader to find such a country, and this could be a good start for experiencing the mnemonic multiperspectivity.

The text juxtaposes different territorial definitions and different cartographic constructions, the description of the landscape layering on each other the different geopolitical divisions of the space as archived «maps»¹⁶. The history of the Rusyns condenses and expresses the stratification of geopolitical maps, and the text recalls the continuous geopolitical re-framing of this ethnic group. The continuous re-framing expresses the border construction itself as a historically mobile phenomenon. Through the narratorial viewpoint the natural landscape appears as an archive of historical changes, of the contesting and contested layered maps. The narrator's point of view has a local (internal) historical consciousness that indicates the hybrid vernacular nature of the border region.

The «Ukrainian border» and «Tungusic Flu» create another interplay between real and imaginary¹⁷. In the novel, the authorities postpone vaccination, because «this winter would be epidemic-free», as Doc [Doctor]

most significantly in the United States. Rusyns have never had their own state, and some of the governments which have ruled over them have ignored or actively tried to suppress the Rusyn historical past. For instance, in the second half of the twentieth century, Carpathian Rus' was ruled by Communist States (Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia) which banned the name *Rusyn* and refused to acknowledge that Rusyns comprise a distinct people, or nationality [...] Rusyns and their cultural heritage were described as Ukrainian, and those individuals, organizations, or publications that did not support the Ukrainian national orientation were, in general, disregarded» (Magocsi in Magocsi, Pop 2002, vii).

¹⁶ Rhutenia evokes, for instance, Galicia, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. See: «Rusyn – ethnonym used to describe the East Slavic population of Carpathian Rus' [...] Until at least the outbreak of World War I the term remained widespread as a designation for Austro-Hungary's East Slavs living in eastern Galicia and northern Bukovina as well as in northeastern Hungary. Since that time, the term *Rusyn* was gradually replaced by Belarusian and Ukrainian as ethnonyms among most East Slavs in the former lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Austro-Hungary. Only the East Slavs living in Carpathian Rus' and emigrants from that region who settled elsewhere (the Vojvodina, United States, Canada) continue to use the ethnonyms Rusnak and Rusyn» (Pop in Magocsi, Pop 2002, 407-408).

¹⁷ See: «Through this interplay between the real and the imaginary, fictional texts re-structure cultural perception» (Erl 2011, 150).

Oleinec concludes, «They've postponed the epidemic». This very cryptic repartee gives an impression of the «logic» of the authorities depicted in the novel, and also of the novel's peculiar humor¹⁸.

The novel's characters are *ab ovo* multiethnic, bringing into play a non-existing imaginary cultural state of the past: Andrei Bodor (in the original, Andrej Bodor), Colonel Puiu Borcan, Béla Bundasian, Gábrriel Dunka, Vili Dunka, Hamza Petrika, Géza Hutira, Cornelia Illarion or Connie Illafeld, Augustin Konnert, Peter Konnert, Petra Konnert, Géza Kökény, Zoltán Marmorstein, Colonel Izolda Mavrodin-Mahmudia or Coca Mavrodin, Mustafa Mukkerman, Doc Oleinek (Oleinek doki), Father Pantelimon (Pantelimon pópa¹⁹), Elvira Spiridon, Severin Spiridon, Bebe Tescovina, Nikifor Tescovina, Toni Tescovina, Colonel Jean Tomoioaga, Colonel Titus Tomoioaga, Colonel Valentin Tomoioaga, Colonel Velman, Toni Waldhütter, Aron Wargotzki, Aranka Westin.

The text provokes the reader (probably not only the monolingual reader) because the multilingual hybrid characters and place names make the reader reflect on the sounding aspect of the literary text. In this textual world, we are faced with a permanent oscillation between written and pronounced language(s). Even the title must be read in a non-Hungarian way, as the Hungarian spelling should be 'Szinisztra' while the name, spelt as in the title, would be read in Hungarian phonetically as 'Shinishtra'. Through these names the accented reading is implicitly inscribed, the novel implicitly embodies its readers as accented. Due to their hybridity, most names can be pronounced in several ways. Most probably there is no such reader who could pronounce every name without an accent. This is not a matter of language skills or lack thereof, these names have inherently dispersive pronunciation possibilities, which create the names as an oscillating sounding zone between

¹⁸ See: «The ganders announced that everyone should go on home in peace since this winter would be epidemic-free, and there would be no need for inoculations [...] / "They've postponed the epidemic," observed Doc Oleinek. / "Yeah." / "You believe that?" / "Why not?"» (Bodor 2013, 89 and 91). Hungarian original: «Most kihirdették, az idén a téli járvány elmarad, oltásra sem lesz tehát szükség, mindenki térjen békében haza. [...] / – Ezek elhalsztották a járványt – jegyezte meg Oleinek doki. / – Megtehetik. / – Maga ezt elhiszi? / – Mért ne» (Bodor 1992, 81 and 83).

¹⁹ Pópa is an Orthodox priest, not a Catholic Father.

different languages and accents. The accent preserves the other language, the interaction of languages as audible present.

The first-person narrator's name is Andrej Bodor, an 'alias' name:

From his pocket he removed a sheet-metal dog tag that dangled, glistening from a watch chain. On it, freshly engraved: ANDREI BODOR. My alias. Colonel Puiu Borcan himself put it around my neck, and then clamped the loose ends of the chain at my nape with little pliers. No sooner had he done so than the metal began warming my skin. *Andrei*, now that part of my new name I especially liked. (Bodor 2013, 25)²⁰

Besides the fact that it contains the writer's surname (Bodor) – a fertile territory for the interplay of reality and fiction –, it is a hybrid name, a Romanian first name (Andrei) with one Hungarian letter in original text (Andrej); it appears like a Hungarian phonetic transcription of the Romanian unvoiced final -i. It remains still uncertain if we should pronounce the 'A' as a short Romanian 'a' or the darker Hungarian vowel, halfway between 'a' and 'o'. Unfortunately, in the English version this multilingual sounding juxtaposition remains silent since the name features as (Romanian) Andrei Bodor. Because of the novel's other references, the text also supports a Polish pronunciation.²¹

²⁰ Hungarian original: «Elővette zsebéből azt az óraláncon függő, csillogó bádoglepocskát, amelyre frissen belevésve sötétlett: Andrej Bodor. Az álnevem. Saját kezűleg akasztotta a nyakamba, tarkóm alatt csípőfogóval összesajtolta a szabad végeket, s a fém máris melegedni kezdett a bőrömmön. Tetszett is az új nevemből az Andrej nagyon» (Bodor 1992, 24-25).

²¹ See for example: «She was the one who then informed me that Colonel Borcan had been sentenced posthumously to death – it turned out that he and a Polish colonel had been cooking up some scheme, and the Pole had been in the habit of smuggling messages, and sometimes real dollars, across the border to Colonel Borcan in the bellies of fish» (Bodor 2013, 14). Hungarian original: «Tőle tudtam meg, Borcan ezredesnek – akit halála után még külön halálbüntetéssel sújtottak – cimborája volt a lengyel határőr ezredes, valamiben törhették a fejüket: a lengyel mindig egy hal hasába rejtve juttatta el hozzá üzeneteit, ha nem éppen valódi dollárokat» (Bodor 1992, 15).

«But I got a tip-off from our Polish comrades that this individual is planning to smuggle something through our country hidden among his folds of skin. Just what, unfortunately, they didn't say» (2013, 54). Hungarian original: «De kaptam a lengyel elvtársaktól egy fülest. Hogy ez a személy a hája közé dugva készül hazánk területén átcsempészni valamit. Hogy mit, azt sajnos nem mondták meg» (1992, XX).

Names are thus oscillating-sounding archives in which pronunciation will always preserve the sounding memory of another language. If they are pronounced in only one language, this results in a reductive expropriation of the shared linguistic and cultural border zone experience.

The novel is mostly narrated by Andrej Bodor in the first-person. The characteristics of the cultural scene, the names of the characters, and the implications of the dictatorship can make one conclude that they speak mostly in Romanian or eventually in other languages, depending on the interlocutors; all the dialogues play out in a hybrid textual and linguistic space. The narrative is written in Hungarian, but the dialogues could be considered as translations because of the mapped border zone²². Therefore,

«It held notebook pages written in Polish: a mimeograph. I naturally burned them at once, mixing the ashes in water and pouring them all over the garden. At that point, however, it didn't matter one bit. Béla Bundasian had gotten mixed up in something.

After the Polish notebooks incident, my adopted son never showed up again. Granted, I'd suspected from the start that something was up, but where could I have searched for him?» (2013, 107). Hungarian original: «lengyelül írott, sokszorosítással készült füzetek voltak benne. Természetesen azonnal elégettem őket, a pernyét föloldottam vízben, szétlocsoltam a kertben. De ez már mindegy volt, Béla Bundasian belekeveredett valamibe.

A lengyel füzetekkel való eset után fogadott fiam többé nem került elő. Gyanút fogtam ugyan már a kezdet kezdetén, de hol kereshettem volna; fölültem a moldvai távolsági személyre, s egy napnyugta után, csikorgó fagyban, szédítő szénaillatban érkeztem Punte Sinistrára» (Bodor 1992, 92).

²² In novel, the region's vernacular is embodied by Connie Illafeld. See: «One fine spring day, back when I worked as an assistant corpse watchman, I finally got to know Connie Illafeld – it wasn't exactly the most delightful meeting I'd ever had, seeing as how, for all practical purposes, she no longer spoke any one single language. Instead, she mixed them left and right, and the only people who could communicate with her somewhat had to know Ukrainian, Swabian German, Romanian, and Hungarian, and it didn't hurt to know Carpathian German and Ruthenian dialects as well. Few such people lived in the Dobrin district, but one of them happened to be the chief bear warden, my friend Doc Oleinek.

Connie Illafeld was a sort of pen name. The progeny of the Illarions – landowning, serf-holding Bukovinian boyars – this woman, who lived among simple mountain folk on her family's onetime estate, had originally been named Cornelia Illarion. Perhaps some other person around there might conceivably have been known as either Cornelia Illarion or Connie Illafeld, one person alone could lay claim to both these appellations» (Bodor 2013, 101). Hungarian original: «Azon a tavaszon, amikor segédhullaőr koromban végre megismertem Connie Illafeldet, nem sok örömöm tellett a találkozásban: jóformán már egyetlen nyelven sem beszélt. Keverte őket összevissza, és csak az értett vele szót valamelyest, aki ukránul, németül, románul és magyarul egyformán tudott, de nem ártott,

the novel condenses not just ‘traces’ of other languages, but its language itself could be interpreted as a translated language. *The Sinistra Zone* as a fictional text restructures Hungarian cultural perception in such a way that we could imagine a Hungarian language as a translated one that is also simultaneously oscillating between different accents.

The novel preserves this continuous oscillation, the inscribed memory of other languages, the reality of a multiethnic community in the past (on the territory of the signaled border zone), which are translated by the text into a Hungarian linguistic experience. By doing so, the novel *Sinistra Zone* transforms the de- and reterritorialized Hungarian language into the preserving, conserving medium of multilingual cultural spaces. The novel creates a fictitious, reintegrative, intermediate discursive space where the different cultural, multi-linguistic references are inseparable, and are saturated with each other in the most organic way.

My last short example for this analysis is Péter Esterházy’s book *Hahn-Hahn grófnő pillantása – lefelé a Dunán* [1992, *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn (down the Danube)* 1999], which could be an illustration of contemporary Hungarian literature as a medium of multilingual cultural memory without being limited to writers with transborder backgrounds.

In a journey «down the Danube», Esterházy creates East-Central Europe as a geographical, historical, cultural, and textual multilingual agency, an intertextual shared *language*:

The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn defies categorization in terms of genre. It is neither a travelogue, nor an autobiography, nor a collection of cultural essays or observations, although it contains a variety of markers pointing to one or another

ha az illető például a ruszin és a cipszer tájszólásokat is ismeri. Kevés ilyen ember élt Dobrin erdőkerületben, egyikük a természetvédelmi terület főmedvése volt, cimborám, Oleinek doki.

A Connie Illafeld afféle művésznév volt, a nőt – a bukovinai bojárok, az Illarionok ivadéka egyszerű hegyi lakók között élt az egykori birtokon – eredeti nevén Cornelia Illarionnak hívták. Az még talán előfordulhatott, hogy valakiket külön-külön Cornelia Illarionnak, esetleg Connie Illafeldnek hívnak, de a két nevet együtt csak egyetlen személy viselhette» (1992, 92).

of these genres. It is not completely fictional, neither is it a mere recording of a referential reality. Esterházy's book combines all of these types of discourse (as well as many others), resulting in a witty, eloquent and, at times, hilarious combination of cultural analysis and anecdotal narrative. Amidst this mayhem of fragmented textuality, the river Danube serves as a force of cohesion, both as a cultural signifier of 'Mitteleuropa' and as a (rather elusive and fluent) center around which the plot of the book revolves.

The Danube, in fact, represents the only linear feature of the plot – or rather, plots – in *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn*. ... Imitating the structure of Claudio Magris's *Il Danubio*, Esterházy's book follows the river's course, starting in southern Germany then moving on through Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and to Romania, where the Danube flows into the Black Sea. Along this curving line, the stories and observations of the protagonist are scattered as though washed ashore by the river. (Molnár 2001, 78-79)

Esterházy finishes his novel with a Hungarian sentence including Romanian words, as follows:

The Hireling decided that when he woke up he'd find his slip of paper and copy down into his notebook the names of all the ships he'd seen that day, 14 August: Razelm, Istria, Salvator, Bucureni, Polar, Malnaș, Izer, Mîndra, Costila, Tîrnava, Somes, Caraiman, Toplița, Polar XI, Cînaș, Snagov, Mizil, Lupeni, Rîureni, Athanassios D, Tîrgu Jiu, Brașov, Vîrsan, Călimănești, Gheorgheni, Voiajor, Leopard, Cardon, Cocora, Dorobanți, Cormoran, Pontica, Căciulata, Grădina, Amurg, Colina, Zheica, Semnal. (1999, 244)²³

The language of the novel is a frontier, just as the meaning of the last Romanian word is 'signal, sign', indicating that the Hungarian (literary)

²³ See the Hungarian original: «Bérlemény arra gondolt, hogy ha majd fölébred, bemásolja a cédulájáról a füzetbe a neveket, azon hajókét, melyeket ma, augusztus 14-én látott: Razelm, Istria, Salvator, Bucureni, Polar, Malnaș, Izer, Mîndra, Costila, Tîrnava, Somes, Caraiman, Toplița, Polar XI, Cînaș, Snagov, Mizil, Lupeni, Rîureni, Athanassios D, Tîrgu Jiu, Brașov, Vîrsan, Călimănești, Gheorgheni, Voiajor, Leopard, Cardon, Cocora, Dorobanți, Cormoran, Pontica, Căciulata, Grădina, Amurg, Colina, Zheica, Semnal» (Esterházy 1991, 251).

language, as well as the Hungarian reader reaches a limit. The listing of Romanian names indirectly signals the lack of Romanian sentences. The limitations of one language are the opening up space for/to the other, and at the same time, they constitute grounds for opening up of one's own language. The monolingual Hungarian reader becomes an accented reader due to the difficulties of reading and pronouncing the Romanian words. The language of Esterházy's novel turns the multilingual shared coexistence of the East-Central European region into a reading practice. Reading with an accent, signals the effort of the appropriation of the foreign. By way of the accent itself, the foreign language remains/persists within the signal, it remains audible. It retains this effort at audible spelling.

The strangeness of the list, its liminal linguistic experience is also an impulse for the imagination. The words listed as names of ships in a port transfer the reader into an imaginary geography of travelling. Listing Romanian place names as a mobile constellation of floating ships in the last sentence of a Hungarian novel is probably one of the most poetic images of East-Central Europe's multilingual legacy as a permanent mobile and shared coexistence.

These examples of «commuting grammars» texts written with a «multilingual self-awareness» (Thomka 2018, 146, 34-35) transmit and translate the multilingual experience and polyphonic cultural memory of East Central Europe intertwined with the experience of the accented readers. These literary works create localized perspectives by juxtaposing (conflicting) historical mnemonic legacies and differences, and by transforming them, as audible vernacular memory, into a shared, dispersed, accented contemporary reading experience.

4. Conclusion

To begin with, in the first part of my essay, I mapped and structured contemporary world literature theories with a special focus on global-local dynamics. On a regional scale, I posited the East-Central European cultural region as an important phenomenon and player in the processes of global circulation and local self-understanding of contemporary literature. Because of cultural interferences and historical juxtapositions, the inner heterogeneity and hybridity of East-Central Europe as a shared territory between different

national and ethnic groups and as a «multilingual self-awareness» (Thomka 2018, 34-35) could be seen and enforced as a common non-nationalistic local background. The multilingual poetics created by «commuting grammars» (ivi, 146) of bi- or trilingual authors whose poetic languages create between different languages, transferring, juxtaposing, layering cultural worlds and social experiences.

In East-Central Europe as a historically and culturally juxtaposed region, I mapped two kinds of phenomena for «multilingual locals» (Laachir, Marzagora, Orsini 2018), which deconstruct the national literary horizons and hierarchies, and which are based on shared multilingual cultural experiences. I explored the possibilities of multilingualism in two ways: on the one hand, I examined the way in which Romanian and Hungarian texts interact with one another, creating «contact narratives» (Kaakinen 2017, 23) about the 1989 regime change and, on the other hand, the way in which literary texts are created as inherently multilingual and whereby Hungarian novels could be seen as mediums of multilingual cultural memory. On a smaller scale in East-Central Europe, the transborder/minority Hungarian literature in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, and Ukraine as an inherently multilingual phenomenon could re-frame and deconstruct the national as a homogeneous entity, since the conceptualization of this literature as multilingual undermines the monolingualism of Hungarian national literature.

In the second part of my essay, I analysed interacting Hungarian and Romanian novels as contact narratives related to the historical events of 1989, which together in different languages through «located perspectives» (Laachir, Marzagora, Orsini 2018, 6) create a common historical past and knowledge. The analysed novels, all reminiscent of the *Bildungsroman* genre, can be understood as a decomposition and transformation of the Communist (state-socialist) ideological conditioning and inscribed fantasies, and as a search for self-expression through language. The novels explore the bildung process as a de-formation process, a self-alienation from the interiorized dictatorial conditions inscribed within the body.

Lastly, in the third part of the essay, I focused on Hungarian literature as a medium of multilingual cultural memories, which «display and juxtapose divergent and contested memories and create mnemonic multiperspectivity» (Erll 2011, 151), which restructure Hungarian cultural perception in

such a way that we could imagine a Hungarian language simultaneously oscillating between accents. The novels I examined, transform the de- and reterritorialized Hungarian language into an audible archival medium of multilingual cultural spaces, creating local perspectives by juxtaposing (conflicting) historical mnemonic legacies and differences. Focusing on the accents, which always preserve the sounding memory of another language, the audible interaction of languages transforms the multi-ethnic memory of a multilingual region into a contemporary audible experience. Reading with accents stages this literature as an oscillating-sounding archive with layered local multilingual memories and, at the same time, as a contemporary oral transnational medium.

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