RELUCTANT SUPPLEMENTS:

HISTORICAL NOVEL, HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL METAFICTION

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Intended to confront frequent charges that in East-Central Europe the Romantic historical novel offers naive poetical devices and undesirable political implications, this article's concern is precisely to show that the the genre may evoke a new approach, despite its apparent ideological investments. A re-evaluation should map out how the genre has interacted with other means of articulating historical sensibility, historical painting and drama, film, art, museum, opera. Although in recent years Hayden White has received a remarkable reception in Hungary, investigations that simultaneously search different fields of culture (like Stephen Bann's efforts to connect the theory of history with that of art, museology, film, etc.), upon which I could rely, have not taken place yet in Hungary. Thus, in this article I restrict the context to other written forms of discourse, with which the historical novel has participated in developing and constantly rearranging the representability of the past. The following account intends to explore the interaction between the different sorts of historical discourses, especially when they take place in unintended or reluctant ways. On the one hand, I shall sketch the historical relationship of historiography and the historical novel, on the other, arguing that metafiction is not a distinct genre but a form of discourse also present in the nineteenth century, I shall deal with the theoretical relation between the metafictional historical novels of the recent past and the romantic-realistic variant of the genre. Interestingly enough, both historiography proper and historiographical metafiction contributed to de-evaluate the historical novel and supported interpretations that denied the seriousness of its supplementing or complementing role. On the one hand, according to nineteenth century historians the historical novel was immature and had an adverse effect. On the other, in the light of Postmodern irony it has been considered too serious and harmless at the same time.

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I. Mutuality and Rivalry

In order to avoid thematizing the origins of the ancient debate over the primacy between history and literature that most probably started as early as Aristotle's *Poetics*, we reduce our starting point to the thesis that until the recent period, the relationship between history and literature had been seen as one of these two ways of supplementation: history as a background of literary interpretation or literature as that of historical knowledge. Since supplementation always changes the field to which a supplement is added, while the added supplement is changing as well, our concern is to develop from these synechdochical oppositions a chiasmatic structure between the two fields.

From the early seventies of the twentieth century it had become less attractive to depict history by separating an independent field of historical *knowledge* from that of historical *writing*. The textual or figural dimension of historical narratives, as it was opened up by (among others) Hayden White, has proved to be an unavoidable element in historical discourses. Alterations in the field of the theory of history imply rearrangements in the way we read historiography, and both changes have an influence on the perspective from which we might interpret the genre of the historical novel. The insight that historical studies cannot be separated from the aspect of historical writing, that rhetorical and fictional patterns prefigure the historical field in which the historian develops her/his argument, and that the will of persuasion determines the historian's rhetorical devices, offers an opportunity to place the question of the historical novel in a new light. If the professional historians' works are to be considered, at least according to Hayden White, what they most manifestly are, literary artifacts, then one should not underestimate the rhetorical and poetical achievement of historical fiction either, even if in its case the degree of adequacy to the so called "objective historical reality" is not always sufficient. By the figurative determination they share, history-books and historical novels reveal a certain kind of mutuality and deeply implicate each other. To refer to how they compete over discursive power, one might call them rivals. In a sense they can be treated as different means of gaining control over the interpretation of the past, over the making and remaking of national history, national memory and identity, politics and hopes for the future.

The peculiar historical sensitivity that developed during the Romantic Period, in a large part manifested itself through the efforts to create coherent national historical narratives and other means of representing the past in a wide range of culture. These narratives in East-Central Europe consisted not only of strengthening or developing national identity but to legitimate discursive power and political goals. Historical novel played a significant and, as we shall try to show, sometimes opposite role in these processes. As a procedure of self-legitimization, during the nineteenth century professional historians tried to dismiss the literary ver-

sions of history, the interpretations of which they were keen to keep under their control. If one takes into consideration that the binary oppositions that have dominated the discourse of the historical novel, namely fictional/factual, representational/figurative, beauty/truth etc., have always implied answers for the implicit question, "what is literature?" and "what is non-literature?", it can be understood that the genre always had to deal with issues concerning the changing boundaries of fictionality and factuality. When during the nineteenth century the notion of what counts as "actuality" altered, the canonical place of the genre weakened.

One does not have to disagree with Hayden White's formalistic views, that fictional and historical narratives fundamentally share the same narratological and figural devices, to recall Dominick LaCapra's probably more historical point of view. According to LaCapra, historians and novelists shared the ambitions to bring about experimental kind of literature until the professionalization of historiography towards the end of the nineteenth century (LaCapra 8). Thomas Carlyle's work, *Sartor Resartus* serves as a great example to support this view, though LaCapra adds, later historiography failed to catch up with the poetical changes of the novel, and the mutuality disappeared.

And so did the rivalry? To put it another way, is LaCapra's argument totally applicable to East-Central European issues? To study the region might help to understand what we might call a peculiar competition of historical discourses.

If one takes into consideration the ways in which two respectable scholars have recently dealt with the historicity of the relationship between literature and historiography, one might conclude that they end up schematizing this relation by reducing its temporal diversity into two unproblematic phases. Lionel Gossman argues that the relation of the two fields had been "unproblematic" before the nineteenth century, for history had been considered a branch of literature. Ann Rigney follows this line of argument, claiming that this relationship remained unproblematic, for during the nineteenth century history and literature became distinct disciplines. Gossman and Rigney appear to deal with a harmoniously structured historical process, claiming that even though the stages contradict each other, they share upon the unproblematic nature of arrangement. It is quite surprising, one might add, that no particular attention is paid to the breakpoint of the story they develop. We shall precisely take into account the very moment, even if this moment lasted for some thirty years, when according to Gossman and Rigney, the unproblematic structure of the relation of the two discourses turns to an antagonistic but equally harmoniously organized one. We shall claim for the existence of a rivalry, which is distinctive to the second half of the nineteenth century.

If historiography proper and the historical novel are taken into consideration as competing discourses, then the breakpoint Gossman and Rigney have overlooked exposes a very significant moment in the story of this relation. We shall claim that

not only the recent historiographical metafiction has challenged the ways historians had understood and represented the past but the historical novel also has always had the power of subversion. The proposal to re-evaluate the nineteenth century historical fiction is not merely to drive home the point that the question of fictionality or literariness has always been a part of the historical discourse in quite problematic ways. To reveal the structure of mutual supplementation between the two discourses might be of great importance, particularly regarding the politics of East-Central European issues. For in East-Central Europe the nineteenth century historical novel is usually presented as if it were partly responsible for the xenophobic tendencies present in the region. Indeed, it could hardly be denied that the genre is one of the most important shapers of the popular images made of the past (*Keresztutak* 120). Nevertheless, if one asserts that the cooperation among the nations in the region is at stake in the case of the genre (*Keresztutak* 120), then one should emphasize that there is a difference between the ways the novels in question can be characterized in the context of the particular time and space they were written and the ways in which the sentiments of those familiar with them have been exploited by political purposes. One should keep it in evidence that texts seldom contain their politics as an essence. Rather they are interpreted politically according to particular historical situations and ideological premises.

We risk the statement that from the second third of the nineteenth century it was rather historiography's concern to develop nationalistically biased, coherent narratives, and that these narratives were opposed by the heterogeneity of the historical novel. Historical fiction did not in every case serve politically biased narratives, rather, up to a point, they contributed to the multivocality and diversity of historical discourses. We shall try to present some of the different stages, through which a rivalry between historiography and historical novel developed. We shall focus on how in the name of expertise this rivalry was eliminated, how professionals tried to reduce diversity, and regain or maintain control over the public.

II. A Professional Closure

In the 1820s the early theories of the novel in Hungary defined the *Roman* as the opposite of *Historia*. Samuel Balog, in his *A Románokról* (Of Novels), claimed that history deals with events as they actually happened (see a familiar notion in Ranke), while the novel is supposed to remain within the domain of the self. "*A Historia a külső vagyis a világi történeteket adja elő; a Román a belső érzelmi történetekkel foglalatoskodik; a Historia úgy írja le a történeteket, a hogy a való világra nézve vagynak, – a Román ugy, ahogy az érzelmekre vagy ideákra nézve vagynak*".

Emotion and imagination are considered devices of the novel and excluded from historical writing. In the next decade József Bajza, in his *A Románköltésről* (Of Novel-Writing), also claimed that what history depicted should have "actually happened, and exactly in the way as it was told" (*'amit beszél valósággal megtörtént legyen, s épen úgy miként elbeszéli'*).

Despite the split articulated in these definitions, the different social tasks attributed to the different disciplines or genres had not been distributed yet as clearly as these citations might suggest. In a sense, in the Romantic Era the historical novel was still considered to fulfil a nationally biased cultural mission. Nevertheless, it was not to convey a straight political meaning in the sense of propaganda, but a significance of expanding the reading audience was attributed to it. On the other hand, the emergence of the genre contributed to the development of the institutions of criticism, of professional ways of reading novels as well. When Miklós Jósika released his first historical novel *Abafi* in 1836, the critics treated it as the act of "founding the Hungarian novel" as such, even though it was by no means the first Hungarian example of the genre. The literary remembrance of the novels from the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century were covered by Jósika's work, which followed the Scottian patterns. Moreover, not only the earlier achievements of the genre became overshadowed, but so did the presence of three other novels, one of them by Jósika himself, written in the very year of 1836. That is why the notion of "founding" has to be considered a rhetorical manipulation and not a perception of a real beginning. By labeling Jósika "the founder of Hungarian novel" critics used his work to legitimate their own practice. The "founding" of their own profession exploited the great success of Jósika's, which paradoxically created a wider range of popular literary life and contributed to the development of professional institutions at the same time, turning the formerly narrow reading public into more like a mass audience.

The letters Ferenc Toldy, the leading literary historian and critic of the time, wrote to Jósika in the 1840s inform us how the literary historian tried to manipulate the writer, suggesting that he should abandon contemporary topics in favor of writing about the figures of the national past to keep fulfilling the attributed mission. The rhetorical devices of creating the fiction of "establishing the Hungarian novel" was implicitly used by critics to have a share in this cultural mission. Later, when historiography proper emerged and the stage of establishing the national novel eventually seemed to be completed, the trope of "founding the novel" disappeared or became meaningless. Jósika, who initially was labeled by it, became extremely devaluated. Nevertheless, the traces of the framework behind the notion of cultural mission were maintained in the surviving tension between popularity and competence.

On the other hand, as early as around 1840s the cultural role Toldy attributed to the genre was questioned. Lázár Petrichevich-Horváth, quite symptomatically a

failed novelist, published an article in the literary magazine, *Honderü* (1843, II. 332), claiming the historical novel to be a very dangerous, a "hermaphrodite" genre, because, while mixing fictional and factual elements, it threatens the safe borders of truth. Nevertheless, Petrichevich concluded by expressing his hope that historiography was going to take the place of the historical novel in the readers' interest to recover and secure the demarcation line between imagination and truth. According to Petrichevich, the excuse for the existence and the popularity of the genre lay in the lack of historiographical institutions, the duties and functions of which were provisionally undertaken by historical novels.

József Eötvös in the Preface of his excellent novel, *Hungary in 1514* (1847), made a twofold statement considering the discourse about the relation of the novel and historiography. One might say that he constituted the conceptual framework for forthcoming debates about how to distribute the tasks in historical discourses. On the one hand, he declared that scientific research should serve for the historical novel, and there was no need to efface the traces (for example quotations from historians) of such a research in the text. On the other hand, historical novels should support the efforts of historians by propagating and popularizing the historical studies for non-professional readers. According to Eötvös, these goals can be achieved in one work. Particularly this proposal proved quite problematic later.

In the early 1850s Zsigmond Kemény considered history a form of literary memory, claiming that historical writing should consist of a balance between the resurrecting and the projecting/creating ("*visszateremtés*") of the past. He was no less sensitive to the aesthetic issues of style than to the scientific problems of historical representation (Kemény 1971, 123–190). Kemény supported the republishing of the Hungarian memoire-writers of the sixteenth century, whose works eventually inspired and influenced the historical novel (thematically at least) from the 1850s. Afterwards they were canonized as literary achievements and are still part of the reading lists in literature departments at universities in Hungary. On the other hand, Kemény's biographical essays about Széchenyi and Wesselényi, adapting a genre practiced by Macaulay and Carlyle, have been praised for their artistic quality, although these portraits appeared to be highly influential in historical discourses as well, concerning the judgement of the roles the portrayed figures played in Hungarian history and intellectual life. They served as artistic examples and as sources for future historians.

However, in the 1850s a new structure started to develop in the discourse of the historical novel. In a parallel way to the processes of separating historiography from literature, the social roles of historians and novelists became distinct. In the eighteenth century a Voltaire, a Hume or a Bessenyei of Hungary produced significant work in fields as divergent as philosophy, history and literature. In the nineteenth century it became increasingly difficult for any individual to partici-

pate in both, although Jósika and Mór Jókai both produced history books, Kemény was a novelist, an essayist and a historian, and Eötvös was equally influential as a politician, a novelist, and a philosopher. History became a discipline practiced by professionals at universities or scientific institutions. In the case of historical fiction scholars and the public began to favor different authors. Mór Jókai and Miklós Jósika came to oppose Zsigmond Kemény, whose work as a novelist and as an historiographer were more supported and accepted by professionals, though he did not attract a wide range of readers. Even Mihály Horváth, a great historian of the age, admits that his biography of Martinuzzi is largely indebted to Kemény's novel, *Zord idő* (1862). On the other hand, Jósika's and Jókai's works, regardless of their popularity, were scandals in the eyes of those whose ambitions aimed at reaching an objective representation of the past.

The issues of falsehood and authenticity are most exhaustively played out in the quite specific contribution to the field of historiography by Miklós Jósika's *A History of Ancient Hungarians* (1861). In being written before the historiographical institutions arose in the late 1860s, this work represents transitional conditions. It is exemplary in the respect that it could not have been published a decade later.

The Preface interprets the relation between historiography and historical novel as a triple supplementation. First, Jósika considers his work (a piece of historiography written by one of the most successful Hungarian novelists of the age) a "stair," which leads up to scientific history. In the second place he speaks about a "bridge" of connection. In the third place, as a supplementation proper, he claims that a novelist is capable and allowed to use literary manners and write about events that would be forbidden for professional historians. Rhetorically, these three ways of supplementation clearly establish the notion of the relation between historiography and historical novel in spatial metaphors, representing a diversity of links. In the sense of the "stair," his work is to reach the "higher" field of historiography proper. In that of the "bridge," it establishes a connection between equally ranked disciplines. As a supplement proper, it completes the work of the historian from the very inside, exploiting devices which the historian cannot lay claim to. Moreover, the notion of diversity occurs in connection with different modes of writing, different disciplines, and different audiences (professional and amateur). Jósika relied upon his own achievements as a historical novelist, claiming that they had got the readers prepared for the present work, that is, to borrow his architectural metaphor of mediation, to vault over the gulf between historiography and literature.

Thus, although Jósika emphasized respect toward historiography, he was conscious of the power the popular novelistic techniques offered him over the reader. For instance, when he depicted the treaty of the Hungarian tribes in the ninth century, in inventing fictional speeches he relies upon certain rhetorical standards of his own age. To be more specific, he emplots the event in such a way that it

strongly recalls certain events connected to the revolution of the 15th of March 1848. The inauthenticity weighs little beside the very striking symbolic parallel which can be drawn between the depicted event and the Hungarian rhetorical tradition. He obviously did not try to give an objective representation as much as to create an allegory of the readers' memory of those revolutionary days. Jósika claimed that his representation of the treaty of the tribes might be denied by historians, but the Hungarian readers familiar with their own tradition will approve it. In a hint he says that the Hungarian readers would know that it could not have happened otherwise. Does he appear to claim that nationally biased prejudices are allowed to verify anything? How are we to account for the disregard for the protocol of historical scholarship? Even though Jósika's work would fail a test by any scientific criteria, it still achieves a highly sophisticated type of authenticity which applies rather to the manner than to the matter of the story. The presence of his images only make sense within a highly determinate context. Jósika's historiographical work exploits the implicit contract which binds to its narrator an audience. His argument reveals that being part of an interpretative community, namely that of the Hungarian tradition of historical remembrance, allows it to verify fictional representations as long as they provide figurative meanings that help the reader to make history intelligible.

At this point it is worth investigating how the owner of the main publishing company of the age, Heckenast, dealt with editing historical books and particularly with Jósika's work. Heckenast was aware that a second edition of the six volumes of *A History of Hungary*, written by a more professional historian, László Szalay and a similar work by Mihály Horváth were to be published in the market. In a letter that he wrote to Jósika about his above-analyzed *Ancient History*, he mentioned that he was not sure if there was a public need for more historical works at the same time. Heckenast, whose opinion as a publisher most likely represented that of the average reader, saw no difference between the work of a professional and that of a historical novelist. He treated both as historical writings. The field of history was not only divided by professional skills, but by popularity as well. Indeed, the demarcation lines were not parallel, but intersected each other.

However, the situation became gradually less and less tolerable after the prevailing institutional conditions had changed by the late 1860s. When professionals started to establish their institutional legitimacy, new voices were to join the choir. In the year of 1867, when amnesty was declared for those who participated in the revolution of 1848–49, Mihály Horváth, probably the most significant historian of the time, returned from exile and immediately became a member of the leading Literary Association *(Kisfaludy Társaság)*. The secretary of the society, Ferenc Toldy, the influential literary historian, in his *laudatio* declaring Horváth to be a new member of the association, emphasized the honoured historian's artis-

tic abilities as his main achievement in the discipline, by which he made a place for Hungarian historiography among the national arts. In declaring this, Toldy considered Horváth a writer, whose stylistic skills compare to those of poets. Horváth in his debut speech (under the title "Why is it that today there are no masterworks of poetry, but we do see masterpieces in the field of historiography?") announced that the time for history as a science had come in the humanities (*Kisfaludy Társaság Évlapjai* 471–489). Such a contrast between the two speeches presumes not merely a misunderstanding between the two scholars but also a conceptual division. The speeches manifest different scientific ideals, and they had very little in common or to discuss. The ceremony displays the introduction of a new kind of relation between history and the arts. Reading Horváth's reply, one is witnessing a highly influential shift from a view that characterized the period before the late 1860s to the one that was going to dominate historiographical thinking from the 1870s. Toldy's concept of literature still included history and other forms of writing, while Horváth was considering historiography a distinct discipline, one among the sciences and not the arts. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that albeit Horváth's concern, which was to dismiss the literacy of historical writing, in his pathbreaking account of the recent past of his age, *Twenty-five Years of the History of Hungary*, he sets an example of mixing political, economical investigations with literary history. Moreover, Horváth borrowed his influential master trope, "reform," from the literary movement of the 1810s and 1820s.

The split was reinforced even on an institutional level. Toldy was the Chairman of the historical department at the academy, while Horváth was participating in a new, independent society. After 1867 the Habsburg government gave permission to establish the institutional network of historical studies in Hungary. At the first meeting of the Hungarian Historical Society (*Magyar Történelmi Társulat*) in his presidential opening Imre Mikó declared that the task of dealing with the past belonged to the historian, who had the exclusive right to define "reality" and to use this knowledge to establish proper models for political thinking and activity. As Mihály Horváth added on the same occasion, history, written by the historians, had to turn itself into the science of national self-knowledge (*Századok* 5–16). These declarations clearly aimed at constituting a form of professional closure. It is not convincing, however, that by these announcements the demarcation line between historiography and literature (the historical novel) had become secure. They were to protect professional interests. However, the further development of the discourse shows that the historians' reflections were not characterized by the feeling of safety, but that of insecurity.

Let us consider the consequences that might be drawn from the fact that in the course of professionalization on an institutional level the task of producing and maintaining images of national history became the property of historiography. According to the claim that the institutions of history have provided historians

with the power to control what counted as a historical event and how it was supposed to be described, the rhetorical or poetical devices of the not painstakingly accurate writers and the power of imagination passed for threatening subversion. To decide what counts as a proper object of inquiry and as a proper way of depicting it, implies a decision about what counts as reality. It is usually the German historian, Leopold Ranke, who is associated with the methodology that the professionalized historiography developed and used. Ranke's famous statement that the historian's task is to depict the past *"wie es eigentlich gewesen"* determined the images historians produced of their work. It is curious to observe the tensions in this declaration. For the poetic and figurative dimensions opened up by the word *"wie,"* a contradiction occurs to the mimetic claims to which the notion of *"eigentlich"* alludes. One might say that although Ranke's statement aims at excluding the means of rhetoric out of the field of historiography, the linguistic form he uses is prevailingly metaphorical. Ranke's claim, one can say, summarizes the paradox of historical representation, that the way of representing always interprets the object that is to be represented. "As" and "actually," form and content are not separable even in Ranke's imperative.

However, to historians had been given the task of judging the past and of instructing the society for what shall be done politically. When historians demanded to decide what counted as reality, literary critics started to dissociate themselves from the representation of history as a cognitive activity. On the one hand, in the 1850s János Erdélyi still asserted that poetry cannot get rid of the claims of truth, in the early 1860s Ferenc Salamon asserted that the emergence of the historical novel had positively influenced not merely the genre of the novel, but had had a great effect on historiography as well (Salamon 495). On the other hand, the critics of the 1870s and 1880s claimed that reading historical novels had nothing to do with reading history in the scientific sense of the word. Moreover, authenticity might deprive the novel of its aesthetic quality (Ferenczi 242). However, to claim that authenticity does not provide artistic greatness, does not imply that these critics were less in favor of a historiographical approach to the historical novel than of a literary approach to history. When they claimed that one more likely reads well-written pieces of historiography with pleasure, they meant stylistic devices, and not that the prefigurative force of fictionality would impose poetical structures on the historical data. According to this concept, history is an independent object exposed to cognitive inquiry. It might be transformed into a romance by the peculiar way of telling it, but the stylistic significance has nothing to do with the access to the past, which is provided by primary sources. The methodological rigidity and self-consciousness of the new paradigm of historical writing contributed to the separation of the field of history from that of literature. The footnotes, which were widely used by historical novelists of the age, became objects of suspicion. Artistic creativity was treated as an act of inspiration and not that of work.

In the field of literature the documentary model was subordinated to the novelist's intuition and empathy. Footnotes were claimed to belong to the field of sciences for two reasons. On the one hand, to allow using them in fictional works would have revealed that footnoting was a rhetorical device of persuasion and did not guarantee objectivity. In this sense the documentary efforts of novels threatened the integrity of science, showing it to be substitutable and laying bare its figurative determination. On the other hand, literary scholars claimed that footnotes, imitating scientific expertise, would sully the sacrality of literary objects or the field of aesthetics in general.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of separation of history and literature cannot be described either as a sudden change or as an eventually settled conflict. The attitude of the professional historians and the literary critics both suggest that the process of separation, which served institutional interests, can scarcely be depicted as fully developed until the very end of the century. The intensity, with which both sides took a stand on the issue laid bare the tensions of mutuality and rivalry between the historical and literary discourses. Regarding French and British cultures, Stephen Bann claims that in the mid-1800s the poetics of the historical representational system introduced an ironical stance and a more emphasized awareness of authenticity (Bann 159). This double bind can be revealed in Hungarian discourses as well. The historical novels Jósika wrote in the 1850s throws the weight of our attention to the signifying system of the text, through inner dialogues, self-questions, broken story lines, fragmented narration, irony, parody, humor, stylization, and self-parody. The representation of the processes that represent the factual object exposed metafictional dimensions. Even though Jósika claimed his novels to be faithful to the historical record, the transitions he frequently made from the discourse of the novelist to that of the historian and back were highly emphasized in his works. He failed to maintain a perpetual balancing act between the different discourses. The transformations regarding modality and rhetorics, according to his critics, subverted the aesthetic harmony by placing ruptures and discontinuities in the text and deprived his works of artistic quality. By the opaque rhetorical devices Jósika employed, his novels threatened not only the separation of fiction and fact, but the seriousness of professional inquiry as well. The representation of representation counted as profanation in the eyes of literary critics and in those of historians alike. Neither side could tolerate the performative power that was manifested through the metadiscoursive approach to history.

To maintain the professional closure, efforts were made to split up the formerly more connected discursive fields. In order to reconceptualize the debate, in the 1870s the Hungarian Academy of Sciences addressed literary critics about the relations among the popular historical sentiment, the literary and the scientific ways of historical writing. The prize-winning essay, written by Károly Szász renewed the familiar concept of mediation (Szász 42–61). Szász concluded that

historical fiction was supposed to mediate between historiography and popular views, because in order to remain plausible in the eyes of the readers, it must have not contradicted the popular sentiment, even though at the same time it must have not ignored new pieces of information discovered by historians. It is curious that in the different notions of mediation we have investigated so far different temporal indexes were attributed to the relation of historiography and the historical novel. According to Eötvös, the novel should *follow* the historian's research in such a way as to take advantage of its assertions in order to make them available for a wider range of the public. According to Petrichevich, the novel represents an *earlier*, preliminary stage in the development of historical discourse, and it becomes illegitimate as soon as the institutions of historiography have been established. Jósika, as we have shown, depicts the relation in spatial metaphors, although the notion of a beginning or a foundation implies temporal dimensions both in chronological and disciplinary sense. He considers his work an introduction to Szalay's *A History of Hungary*, narrating a prehistoric phase with which the historian refused to deal. Károly Szász established a dynamic relation between the two fields, claiming that the historical novel must have turned plausible in the eyes of the public those pieces of information which were provided by historiography, but happened to oppose the popular beliefs. In this sense, the novel works *before and after* the historiography at the same time.

The disintegration of the historical field showed up more quickly in the literary critic's and historian's sphere than among novelists and readers. In 1885 at the Historical Society's conference, beside the methodological discussions they warned the audience (and themselves) once again that the past can only be known from historians' works, and not "by reading those senseless, stupid novels" (Rómer 119). The historians were aware that the gap between the scientific, professionally legitimized knowledge of the past and the so-called popular consciousness of the national history cannot be bridged easily. The latter remained the domain of historical novelists, even after their reliability had been scientifically questioned. That is why in the 1880s most scholars started to deny the interplay of the two genres. We shall particularly note the debate, where it was asked whether it is "allowed for the poet or the writer of a historical novel (...) to construct stories contrary to the given historical record (...) and spread incorrect knowledge and views" (*Budapesti Szemle* 479). The way the question was raised shows that the discussion appealed to ethical and even legal concerns regarding the legitimization of non-professional historical discourses. The polemic was in defense of the claim that novelists were not allowed to contribute to historical discourses. The measure of a writer's freedom is determined by the degree to which a writer is allowed to collide fictionality with factuality, literature with life, art with power. The professionals explicitly denied the ability of literature to grasp historical reality, but as a matter of fact they did sense the great influence writers had on what

the public thought to be plausible or desirable. By the way, the same logic seems to be at work even in the recent studies about the genre. On the one hand, they expose the weaknesses of this literary kind, on the other, they attribute to it a great power of influencing readerly beliefs.

Nevertheless, it is not that historians showed no consideration for the public. It should be further investigated that as the historical novel became culturally exhausted, historiography started to gain financial success. When at the end of the century the boom in the popularity of historical novels was over, historiography proper found its place on the readers' shelf. In 1896, when the celebration of the millennium of the Hungarian state took place, the volumes of the ceremonial national history were a huge commercial success as well. However, after the disastrous events the Hungarian public had to face in the twentieth century a reconciliation of fiction and history became far more difficult to achieve.

Research programs constructing coherent images of national history had to face not only the resistance of the raw material of records, but that of public opinion as well. In the nineteenth century beliefs shared by the average reader were still controlled by popular novels. These beliefs resisted the historical research, and the situation hardly changed even after the public had learnt to recognize the difference between scientific and artistic approaches. Is it then a regional characteristic that in East-Central Europe the scientifically held views of history and the popular sentiment are much more different than in other areas of Europe? (Gunst 4). One could easily conclude that the popularity that the genre enjoyed for a very long period made the area vulnerable to extreme ideological-political challenges from both left and right. One might assert that to chase dreams of desirable national histories is largely responsible for the intolerance and suffering this area has experienced. Nevertheless, one should emphasize the responsibility of the officially sponsored histories as well. Nowadays no one believes that historians have always avoided partisanship. The images of a desired past were very often supported by historians too, making it easier for political extremists to use these desires (see Romanians seeking their origins in ancient Rome, Hungarians in the Hun Empire or in the ancient Middle East, etc.). In the age of right-wing ideologies in the midwar period or in the period of Marxist ideologies after World War II, the official rewritings of the past were both linked to ideological purposes regardless of what kind of political preferences they held. Thus, if the Romantic historical novel played a role in that the fictionality of history has remained vivid in the region, it can have favorable effects for Postmodern cultures. The fact that it is difficult to separate fictionality and reality in the region can provide a starting point to undermine prejudices toward the genre and toward different cultures a well.

It is also worth investigating why the political implications of historical writing are judged quite differently in the Eastern and the Western parts of Europe. On the

one hand, scholars, who in the 1980s tried to assess the role East-Central European historians played in shaping the political configuration of the region, concluded that "historians as craftsmen in the task of nation-building have had much success." They also stated that the efforts of historians "followed the prevailing political climate" in the sense of legitimating it rather than took the initiative in political changes (*Historians as nation-builders* XIII). On the contrary, in a recent study concerning national histories in Western Europe, the point was made that even though to reveal national biases often leads some "to dismiss all history writing as distorted," one should keep the existence of a "diversity of historiographical nationalisms" in evidence (*Writing National Histories* 281–282). Thus, it appears that in East-Central Europe historical writings are considered to directly serve previously established political purposes, while in the West diverse nationalisms are "differently related to the distribution of power in a given society" (282) and history-writing is not deducible from prevailing political structures. Shall we accept, then, that discursive relations are more complex in the West? Perhaps a more detailed inquiry might reveal that politics is not a master and history is not a servant. They are connected in more complex ways – even in East-Central Europe. The insight that the relation between politics and writing constitutes an at least two-way street, should replace the rhetorics of scapegoating.

III. Romanticism and Metafiction

Regarding the origins of the historical novel one can find two models used by literary historians to account for the development of the genre in East-Central Europe. One is when the evolution of the genre is depicted as a progress from the Scottian origin, which contains an antiquarian sensibility offering external representation of customs and manners and emphasizing the outward appearance of characters and the exterior description of objects, to the realistic principles, which focus on the inward processes of past minds, offering psychological realism and an increased faithfulness to historical data. The other view, which conveys stronger regional features, argues that the Romantic historical novel replaced the heroic epic, for it continued to fulfil the task of praising the national past (Imre 137–155). According to this view the epic and the historical novel both idealize their heroes, they forge historical data to serve present goals, and they only account for those facts which support the efforts to legitimate nationalistic demands (*Keresztutak* 124). Consequently, if its main function were to serve the dominant national narrative, the historical novel would be deprived of the critical and the self-critical force the novelistic narrative in general conveys in comparison to the ideological purposes of the epic. In both cases, the Romantic historical novel sig-

nifies something provisional and eventually disdained. On the one hand, in an ideological way it is a successor of the epic, on the other, concerning poetical skills, it is a product of antiquarianism and superficial representational procedures.

According to this perspective, the decline of the classic tradition of the genre was due to the fact that the Romantic version of the genre reappeared in the twentieth century as youth-literature or adventure novel. That is why the works of the successors of Géza Gárdonyi or Jókai were mostly treated as trash in the 1960s and 1970s. Nineteenth-century historical fiction, which mostly took the form of romance, became a disdained genre, for, according to modernist expectations, it failed to satisfy realistic principles. The separation of "real" representation of history and "historical mockery" was established on an ideological base, which opposed low and high literature, true and false history. This conception lies beneath the judgement, that a historical novel is inherently unable to produce as many meanings as a lyrical poem, or in other words, it is easier to reach an agreement on the meaning of a historical novel than on that of a lyrical poem (Bojtár 51).

During the Communist Era the historical novel was mainly treated as if it had already played its role in the development of high-realism (Lukács) and lacked the abilities of renewal. The East-Central European tradition of the genre became deeply de-evaluated as a version of "reactionary Romanticism." This notion included every author whose views did not fit into the teleological prejudices of orthodox Marxism. The works of Zsigmond Kemény, for instance, were silenced between 1947 and the late 1960s, because of the author's doubt in progress and his lack of belief in mass movements. In general his irony and skepticism were refused. Mór Jókai was charged with offering unrealistic models for nationalism by developing a peculiar "happy-heroic consciousness" of history in his popular historical romances.

It is quite interesting to follow how these aspects survive in the Postcommunist Era. A recent reason to condemn the genre is that in the region it has, as one of the most influential contributors to the collective memory of the society, thrown an obstacle in the way of a valid cultural self-knowledge (*Keresztutak* 127). This claim merely updates the ideological charge of opposing progress, renaming it as political incorrectness. However, to insist on reading these novels as political allegories could easily lead to a failure to realize that the political implications of content and form do not always coincide. For radical or progressive political messages may be accompanied with conventional poetical devices, while conservative or even politically incorrect issues may be articulated by experimental or by poetically influential means (Berkhoffer 238). In the case of the historical novel, its postulated ideological purposes led to the dismissal of the genre. However, we

shall argue that their political incorrectness is not always obvious, even if one reads them on a thematic level. To explore the politics of poetical and rhetorical structures is a more relevant approach.

One of Miklós Jósika's early novels *A csehek Magyarországban* (The Czechs in Hungary, 1837) presents a scene from the fifteenth century. The plot partly deals with a Czech community, the *Hussites*, a militant religious group, charged with heresy by the Catholic church, that occupied lands and castles in the northern territories of king Matthias of Hungary. An interpretation in the 1980s (Dobossy 677–706) recalled the novel and confronted its postulated nationalistic biases with its contemporary Czech literary reception, pointing out that the Czech public felt offended when the translation of the novel was released. To compare receptions in different national contexts is a very promising departure, but in this case the results are rather contingent. Not merely because another historical novel, Jósika's *Esther* (1853), which deals with a young Jewish lady's fortune in the fourteenth century in Poland and Hungary and with her efforts to use the influence she has as the mistress of the Polish king to protect her people can be randomly mentioned to prove that the plot of a historical novel is not by definition made up to spread ethnic insensitivity and national hatred. Moreover, when *Esther* was translated to Polish, it received a quite pleasant literary reception in Poland.

Indeed, the genre can be re-evaluated not only because of thematic concerns. If one ends up claiming it to be scandalous that the same events might be interpreted very differently or even contrarily according to national biases, then one forgets his/her own *epistemological* biases and prejudices. Namely, the illusion of objective representation, that an account should reflect, in the Lukacsian sense of the term, the social reality as it actually had been. When the above-mentioned interpretation relies upon the obvious existence of different vantage points and emplotments to declare that the historical novel is an unreliable account of historical events and a dangerous tool of spreading intolerance among its readers, then it unfortunately hinges on oversimplifications that underlie the Lukacsian approach, which nowadays are questioned by even Marxist critics (Foley 77–79). A reader may come to the conclusion that the possibility of different interpretations corresponding different biases are politically incorrect only if she/he approached the genre without paying attention to the very sophisticated ways in which some of these novels, for example the *Czechs*, justify the notion of cultural and temporal relativity. The short Preface of the novel announces that the work has reached its intended goal of "a successful reading" if the male reader compares himself with the qualities of the hero, and the female reader looks at the heroine as a moral example. Although regarding the moral orientation offered it appears to be didactic and suspiciously authoritarian, the novel offers much more complex patterns. It becomes quite ambiguous how to accomplish the expectations of the Preface. Concerning the characters of the novel to whom the preface seems to allude, it

becomes more and more recognizable that the hero, Elemér, and his chivalrous ideals are considered anachronistic and old-fashioned by most of the characters in the novel (including the king, the ultimate instance). Consequently, the figure with whom the reader should identify fails to suggest the eternality of values. On the contrary, it emphasizes the temporal determination of them. The heroine is a young lady from a Jewish family, called Aminha, whose hidden Christian origin is revealed at the end of the novel. To those who want to convince her to rejoin Christianity, she declares that she keeps the religious belief by which she had been brought up, because, as she tells to the lords and high-priests, "*time is the gap between us* (...) *We believe in things-to-come, which are past in your eyes.*" To offer her as a moral example implies the suggestion that the different notions of temporality (the "gap" between Jews and Christians) can legitimate different cultural and religious values. To claim that traditions or cultures with different notions of temporality are equally respectable implies that the patterns by which the reader shall develop his/her identity inevitably turn him/her toward an ironic or self-reflexive way of reading. Thus, the novel avoids didacticism for two reasons. First, because to read the novel by approaching it from the preface implies reflections, whether the novel becomes a story of the success or the failure of reading. Second, because the patterns suggested in the Preface fail to impose moral considerations on the reader as much as a complex and relativistic network of the cultural and historical elements that determine the identity and therefore the success of reading as well.

It is worth considering further examples to show that the nineteenth-century historical novel offers more than political or moral incorrectness, and contains more than narrow-minded notions of history accompanied with naive representational forms.

In Zsigmond Kemény's novel, *A rajongók* (The fanatics, 1858), the scenario of the Thirty Years' War, which Odo Marquard once called an essentially "hermeneutic war," displays history as a struggle over the interpretation of its own ultimate meaning. The plot deals with a small religious group, the Unitarians, who were, in the early seventeenth century, tolerated in none of the European countries except in Transylvania. Their attempts to gain legal acceptance and equal collective rights along with other Protestant beliefs serve as a background. The religious debate that leads to the tragic collision at the end of the novel offers a framework to show how different beliefs imply different conceptions of time (and consequently of history). Discrepancies between the official ideology of the Reformed Church and state on the one hand, and the religious beliefs of the Unitarians on the other, are due to the different notions of historicity they respectively hold. Borrowing Karl Löwith's terms, one can say that the Unitarians hold a view of history from the perspective of *Ewigkeit*, while the official ideology occupies a position of *Zeitlichkeit* (Löwith 235–315). In the avoidance of the providential structure

both in the subject matter and in the poetical structure, Kemény's novel treats the institutionalization of Calvinistic Protestantism as a shift from experiencing earthly events in the light of a divine order to a temporally arranged experience of history. One might even say that the novel represents the very moment, when history ceased to be a divine notion, when it left its theological connotations behind, and emerged as a secularized and temporal entity.

Another novel by Kemény, *Zord idő* (Grim time, 1862), offers allegories for all-time readers by establishing a network of prophecies and historical prognoses. The story runs in 1541, the year the Turks took the royal seat of Buda. The rhetoric of forecast is employed to destabilize the linear ways of experiencing history. The leading characters are forced to come to the conclusion that the relationship between past and future must be considered asymmetrical. In the scenes of discussions, when the Hungarian lords debate about how to respond to the appearance of the Turkish army at the walls of Buda, and how to avoid a siege, past examples are evoked to support desirable expectations. Thus, the reader who is aware of the actual consequences becomes persuaded, that plans and expectations concerning the future cannot be deduced from experiences of past events. The multiple perspectives developed in these discussions become a kind of replay of earlier voices and an anticipation of later voices representing a wide array of historical contexts. The present itself, as a moment of human actions aspiring for historical significance, is shown to be a place of rupture, as intentions and consequences radically start to differ. The interpretations of the past and the present are in constant change as the temporality of experience keeps rearranging the structures, according to which history or histories, determined by hopes and fears, can be told. When one of the lords (Frangepán) proposes the hypothetical history of the next two centuries in the form of a prognosis, the novel ends up contradicting itself. This scene, when the "real" future is actually revealed, is not a failure of objective representation or an example of anachronistic fallacy, but contributes to establishing a tropological space, in which the future readers may rethink their own temporal determination. For the "true" prophecy ironically claims that one cannot help imposing meanings on history, even if by the very act of forecasting the interpretation detaches itself from reality and by its rhetorical form necessarily misses to match the way events actually unfold. Prophecy has no power of eventual resolution, because it can be true only in the form of a subsequent narrative. In being made from the author's nineteenth-century perspective, this account holds no promise of reconciliation but constitutes an allegorical structure of the always uncertain future.

These examples might prove that the nineteenth-century historical novel is not in every instance a genre of naivete. On the contrary, these works are able to deal with metahistorical aspects. The traces of "self-destructing nationalism" (*Kereszt-*

utak 127) cannot be obviously detected in them. Consequently, instead of treating the genre as an obstacle in the conversation among the different ethnic groups and cultures in the region, if we connect political implications with poetical means, it can be revealed that the historical novel could serve as the very metalanguage of a dialogue. The best pieces of the genre contain a wide variety of discourses, in which the different voices are provided the opportunity to communicate with or of each other. When they do so, they remind the reader of the contingency of imposing meanings on history. When they fail to address other cultures, they at least provide a field to lay bare the prevailing prejudices beyond hostility and communication breakdown rather than simply ignoring them.

Let us turn now toward the recent development of the genre to achieve the comparison we proposed. In the 1990s novelists tried to resurrect the genre. Their works have been mainly considered the Hungarian representatives of the so called "historiographical metafiction." Their main concern has been said to be not the depiction and objective judgement of the events of a certain historical period, but rather the reflection upon the standard strategies of the generic repertoire. János Háy's novel, *Dzsigerdilen* (1996) reaches back to Mór Jókai's heritage by citing from him even in the title. Háy's work permanently alludes to the standard literary devices of the Romantic author as it constantly re-develops and abandons the means of the Romantic genre, occasionally through a network of intertextual references. To mention a few, some of the characters interpret the events as if they were familiar with Gárdonyi's historical novel, *Az egri csillagok* (The stars above Eger, 1901) or the midwar poetry of Attila József, or as if they were aware of being fictional characters. The novel of László Márton, called *Jacob Wunschwitz igaz története* (A true story of Jacob Wunschwitz, 1997), most probably resulting from the author's encounter with Kleist as a translator, rewrites the story of Michael Kohlhaas and attempts to deal with issues such as the integrity of a story and the tellability of a life. The first volume of Zsolt Láng's series, *Bestiarium Transylvaniae* (1997) develops a plot in the seventeenth century of Hungary, a scene favored by the Romantic writers. The novel revives the structure of a long-forgotten form, the manual of fictional-mythical animals, to play with the representational techniques of the historical novel and to slide them toward the field of the fantastic. László Darvasi's novel, *A könnymutatványosok legendája* (The legend of the tear-exhibitioners, 1999) tries in one sense to realize the literary plan of the recently died Miklós Mészöly (the novel is dedicated to him) as far as it is concerned to write a "multicultural mythology" of East-Central Europe. On the other hand, his work was clearly influenced by Milorad Pavic's novel, *Hazarski Recnik*. In Darvasi's novel the chronological constraints are abandoned. The plot embraces two centuries (the sixteenth and the seventeenth) in such an arbitrary way, that it resists any attempt to establish a causal-teleological order among the events. The

dechronologization is accompanied with and strengthened by the image of a fantastic or mythical world, where the events unfold. In this case, the notion of a geographical space, namely that of the East-Central European region, as a region of a high degree of diversity and inherent fictionality, serves as a trope of representing history.

Nevertheless, the revision of the genre has not re-evaluated the nineteenth-century historical fiction (not sure that it meant to). Moreover, the fact that these metafictions attached themselves to the Romantic version surprisingly vitalized the hostility toward the nineteenth-century genre. The reason for this lies partly in the implicit survival of the Lukácsian approach to the historical novel. One might even say that in the 1990s the historiographical metafiction, as an act of salvation, resurrected the dead genre by making its "traditional heritage" even more forgotten and irrelevant. However, the emergence of the historiographical metafiction should have called into radical question the previously valid teleological pattern of the generic development, for, regarding their intertextual repertoire, the historical novels of the 1990s strangely but not surprisingly preferred the once devaluated popular version (Gárdonyi, Jókai) to the once respected realistic one. But the practice remained vivid to interpret the nineteenth-century historical novel as a vehicle of unrespectable political views (intolerance, national biases, focusing on the victors), and as a genre that mistakenly treats representation as a neutral and immediate device, rather than a linguistic and figurative procedure. Thus, ironically, the revisionists reinforced the traditional way of approaching the generic development as a teleological path. This implies that the genre has played its role in the history of the novel or of historical imagination or of human consciousness etc., it has reached its peak in Romanticism, or in realism or in the modernist myths about the past; thus the Postmodern version marks the end of the genre, for it is the end of the novel of verisimilitude as well.

Besides the approach which attempted to reveal the ontology of the historical consciousness inherent in the genre without reflecting upon how the metafictional histories have modified our awareness of the genre (Bényei 60), according to views more in favor of Postmodern achievements, the historiographical metafiction re-established the vividness of the genre at the expense of effacing the origin it remade. These novels, as it has been claimed, laid bare the traditional novel's poetical and political failures, though they do not always succeed in overcoming the difficulties of getting rid of the unfavorable or undesirable heritage. Although, one should note that by labeling these novels historical metafictions they slightly misunderstand Linda Hutcheon, whose term they use, for she claims that historiographical metafiction "inscribes and only then subverts its mimetic engagement" (Hutcheon 20).

Our proposal is that the revival of the genre in metafictional literature also can be seen as a symptom of the sharpening relation between Romanticism and

Postmodernism due to deconstruction or New Historicism. However, not in the sense that the Romanticism "deconstructs" itself, or that contemporary readers and authors would still live in an era determined by Romantic metaphysics, epistemology, imagination, etc. If Romanticism and Postmodernism imply each other, then this relationship takes the form of an "asymmetrical mirroring." According to Jerome J. McGann, the impression many contemporary scholars share, that Romanticism somehow "intended us" and the texts that are written nowadays, might be confirmed, but this experience can only be revealed by us, who make Romanticism to intend us (McGann 106). If Romanticism, as we are able to see today, is considered to be both an effect of our view and a cause that determines who we are and how and what we see, then the relation between then and now is grasped as a non-linear kind of implication and the ironic distance is retained. That is why we are inclined to think that to keep an opposition between a representational and a metafictional version of the historical novel misses the point completely. The new achievements of the genre during the 1990s and the fact that eventually the Romantic version has been recalled should turn the attention toward the Romantic heritage of the historical novel. As the above-mentioned László Márton pointed out in his influential essay, the "rediscovery of history" has to go along with the reconsideration of the literary devices which used to represent the past (Márton 1999, 235–266).

It has been argued that Postmodern fiction reads the Romantic historical novel in an ironic way. However, critics have been slow to recognize that the historical novels of Romanticism are able to read their Postmodern successors as well. If we take into consideration that the devices of metafiction are inherent in the tradition of writing novels (Waugh 5), then it requires us to consider the historiographical metafiction not something distinct from the traditional historical novel and not something from which a poetically or politically superior point of view could be drawn. The relevance of the recent achievements of the genre should not serve to reveal the postulated weaknesses, errors or even sins of the "normal paradigm" of historical writing. Postmodern fiction not merely subverts but takes for granted our acquaintance with the pre-existent model, as it both imitates and subverts it. For the metafictional component of the historical novel consists of a dialogue with the tradition of historical representation and the devices of this representation as well. In this dialogue the heritage of the genre shall have its own voice. The generic revision of the 1990s cannot be grasped by arguing that the revisionary texts move beyond the heritage of the genre by simply negating its "representational or referential fallacy" its omniscient narrators and homogeneous structures. Even in the most authoritarian texts there exist elements that act against the simple readability of demonstration (Suleiman 236–243). Lots of nineteenth-century novels were blamed by their contemporary critics for having the same features (dechronologization, obscurity, fictionality, invention, unfaithfulness to the his-

torical data, heterogeneity, support for certain political views) that critics tend to celebrate today in a contemporary novel. It is worth emphasizing that didacticism is a feature of historiographical metafiction (Waugh 11). The genre of the historical novel has never been a self-identical, stable and consistent mode of writing, but rather a discourse about its own definition or a discourse considering the possibility of its own existence. The possibility of a revision develops from the cracks in the unfolding of the traditional narratives, from the presence within this very tradition of something that works against its totalizing claims.

The traditional strategies of historical representation have the textual skills to relativize or even dismiss its declared ideological determination. The various achievements of historiographical metafiction that concern themselves with Postmodernism have their roots in the pioneering achievement of the historical novels. The historical novels of the Romantic Era developed a clearly recognizable ironic attitude toward their ideological investments. To account for this could help us to, as the Romantics did, go beyond our own declarations.

Hayden White argues that historical or factual writing is always prefigured by rhetorics as a system of tropes. Ann Rigney argues that mid-nineteenth-century historiography employed rhetorics as a set of devices to serve a will of persuasion. One might add that the frequently emphasized realistic claims of the historical novel are worth reading in a figurative or dialogic way as well. Of course, one should not leave the achievements of Postmodern fiction out of consideration. The definition of historical fiction has "broadened," but it does not mean that it used to be "narrow." New novels obviously increase or rather alter the possibilities of a genre, but "new" devices usually prove to be inherent in the tradition they remake, or at least they retrospectively write themselves back into the tradition. It also needs to be recalled that the discourses of the nineteenth-century are far from being monological. The composing and decomposing strategies of the "historiographic metafiction" have remarkable traces in the Romantic corpus. The revision rediscovered its own devices in the very origin it had rewritten.

In this connection, it is worth pointing out that straight political "messages," emphasized by Elisabeth Wesseling in her recent book as the Postmodern innovation of the historical novel, are hardly recognizable in the Hungarian novels of the 1990s. East-Central Europe is perhaps a special case in this regard, for the vulgarized political interpretations the Communist Era imposed on literary works have eventually made writers and scholars reluctant to consider texts as *expressions* of sociopolitical ideas. The politics of historiography or the historical novel can be hardly characterized as a denotation of an (even textual) referent as much as a figurative activity, a politics of poetics, when the ideology preferred by the narrative is determined by the linguistic protocol the narrative follows.

In the preceding argument, my concern has not been so much to depreciate the achievement of Postmodernism as to draw attention to the Romantic novel. The

historical metafiction, no doubt, altered the way we treat historical discourses. However, the altered conditions also remove the vantage point from which the Romantic historical novel can be judged, understood or articulated. At this stage we are provided a framework within which new readings of the genre can take place.

IV. A Short Genealogy of Genealogy

Finally, as a conclusion to the article and in order to illustrate the continuities between the Romantic and the Postmodern versions of the genre, I shall compare one of the recent works of the contemporary Hungarian historical fiction and a novel of the romantic kind. The focus of this short analysis is reduced to a single aspect. The issues of genealogy as a subject matter and as a poetical structure are only relevant here.

The recent novel of Péter Esterházy, one of the best-known contemporary Hungarian writers, is *Harmonia caelestis* (2000). Some say, that it even introduces, as a literary manifestation of and a literary response, a new era in cultural conditions, reaching beyond Postmodernism. (See the excellent reviews recently written about the novel: Balassa, Szegedy-Maszák, Thomka.) Successfully synthesizing the microhistorical orientation of the 1970s–1980s and the achievements of the metahistorical approaches to the textuality of history of the 1990s, Esterházy juxtaposes the devices of the historical novel and those of the family novel to combine personal and national histories in quite exciting fictional processes. Rethinking family history has played a significant role in recent investigations concerning the micro-history of past events. To change the level of consideration from macro-history to the experience of everyday life has remarkably changed not merely the agents by whom history is made, but the very notion of what one might call history has been altered as it is being told by voices never listened to before. However, in the case of *Harmonia caelestis*, it is not merely a shift from macro to micro level that brings about a peculiar view of history. In the author's case, family stories have greater import. As it is known, Esterházy was born into a significant Hungarian aristocratic family. His family's history in the twentieth century, as the second part of the book (*Egy Esterházy család vallomásai*; Confessions of an Esterházy-family) depicts it, is characterized by the sometimes gradual, sometimes sudden decrease and loss of the once gained power and influence. Esterházy, to prove that the loss of political power does not necessarily coincide with that of narrative skills, employs the narratives of, about, or by his once powerful ancestors from the last four-five centuries to connect the history of Hungary with the narrator's personal life-story.

One of the main characteristics of Esterházy's art is his devotion to implicit quoting. Intertextuality in historical writing always implies the question of au-

thenticity. In this case the enormous intertextual network mediates between history and fiction without reducing the one to the other. Though the interweaving of intertextual chains makes it no longer so much a question of the validity of documentary sources as of different worlds brought about by different languages. Regarding the relation of imagination and the materiality of history, the novel, on the one hand, inserts historical elements into fictional worlds and vice versa, on the other, in its vast intertextual apparatus it effaces the difference between original and "lent" texts, verifiable and forged historical writings. Implicitly quoting Danilo Kiš's story about a young Esterházy waiting for his execution (*Encyclopedia of the Dead*), the novel reveals its regional links as well.

The overwhelming abundance of the not merely evoked but constantly reconstituted historical material turns the attention toward what has been lost, focusing on the import and significance of property and possession for the possessor or the inheritor. In the novel, the feature of discontinuity, which is so characteristic of the region, the impossibility of bequeathing values, the constant defeat and annihilation of traditions is displayed as not merely a peculiarly regional experience but it is transformed into an idiosyncratic type of historical fiction. "*Itt soha semmi sem folytatódik, mindig mindent újra kell kezdeni*" (694) ("here nothing ever continues, everything is to be started over and over again").

In comparison to the fragmentized first book, the second part represents a slightly more traditional narrative form, reintroducing metonymical and synechdochical relations such as temporal sequences and links of motifs. The personal line's main concern is to settle up with the inheritance of the father. However, the unfolding of the relation between father and son is subordinated to the explicit problems of the narration, as it takes place not so much on the thematic and psychological levels as on the level of textual imagery. In the first part, called *Számozott mondatok az Esterházy-család életéből* (Numbered sentences from the life of the Esterházy-family), the term "my father" stands for a whole range of different characters, only occasionally denoting once lived family members. The sequence of short pieces, sometimes of a size of a paragraph, sometimes of a few pages, shows no trace of chronological, only that of figurative order. The identity of the narrator is brought about by these genealogical substitutions in such a way that describing himself as "my father's son" he becomes linked to the changing references from the history of Hungary. In the first part these provisional identities are mediated by the void of the family name, which becomes exposed to endless imaginary substitutions. In its displaceable character the central term may stand for a particular father, for a universal notion of all the fathers, and for the very absence of the father. Similarly, *the* Esterházy family is merely *an* Esterházy family, as the title of the second part shows. Since a name can be "proper" only if has only one meaning, in these genealogical substitutions the name ceases to be a name, and becomes a sign or rather many signs of access to the past. The

constant displacements, transformations that subvert the identity of the central trope, the "father," exposes the impossibility of a linear survey of the genealogical network.

In the process of transforming the past, evoking and effacing historical referents, memories, the novel is not to follow or reflect a pre-established order of history, but employs more or less known elements in a constant play of substitutions. However, the novel is not to collapse the separation between fact and fiction. The fine oscillations between fiction and fact, instead of merely effacing every possible center of meaning, rather constantly compose and decompose the consistency of historical contexts, in the first part even on the level of a sentence. That is why that in the "father's" and in the narrator's case, the displacements are made in a space between recognizable and ambiguous identifications. History's narrative patterns are personalized. Simultaneously, personality is historicized according to different historical contexts in which stories may be told about it. To understand the "father" is to understand the diversity of possible histories as the "fathers" of all of us.

Nevertheless, it is curious to note that Esterházy chose the trope of the father to articulate the past. For the trope of the mother would have been a more obvious choice as a figure of inheritance. History as mother or as mothers or as the absence of a mother, on the other hand, would have brought about quite different poetical relations. However, as a matter of fact, when the father is mentioned, the figure of the mother is implicitly there. On a connotative level, a comparison to the notion of the father evokes binary oppositions such as natural and artificial, certain and arbitrary. For the mother is usually not mentioned in the patriarchal genealogies, even though it is always the mother who is naturally involved in the process of descent. It is also the mother, whose person is certain among the ancestors, while the father may be exposed to rumors, and can never be known for certain. Thus, in having the trope of the father as an access to the past, the ambiguity and, in the last instance, the imaginary character of history is exposed.

As we have seen, the overburdened historical semantics of the name Esterházy leads to contingency or arbitrariness. In order to analyze the means by which genealogy was treated and used in Romanticism, now I turn to Miklós Jósika, who also happened to be born into a family of historical significance. He also wrote a biographical novel about one of his ancestors from the sixteenth century (*Jósika István*, 1847), but an equally good text to complete the inquiry with is his *Az utolsó Bátori* (The last Bátori, 1837). It also offers a great opportunity to analyze genealogical patterns, for it deals with an equally oversemanticized historical name, that of the Báthory. At the first sight *The last Bátori* appears to be an ordinary historical biography of the reigning prince of Transylvania from the early 1600s. The first link to *Harmonia caelestis* is that the hero, a descendant of a long-ruling family, Gábor Bátori, in his actions and self-understanding is also surrounded by

a semantic network of the family name. Gábor Bátori is represented as a non-substantial figure, for his identity is totally determined by the different variants of his ancestors' names (Zsigmond Bátori, István Bátori, Erzsébet Bátori) from the sixteenth-century Transylvania. The names are bearers of very different value systems. The novel undercuts the progress of getting familiar with the genealogy in the very unfolding of the narrative, as the hero becomes interpreted in comparison with the examples inherent in the network of the family's history. It is quite significant that this vantage point, though it is certainly established in the context of a Romantic novel, is articulated from a contemporary viewpoint in the novel. For even it is supposed to be the historian, who has the methodologically sufficient perspective for making judgements about historical significance, in Jósika's novel it is not the narrator but the characters who articulate the genealogical aspect: "*éltesebb férfiak Gáborból egy új Zsigmondot jósoltak.*" Or as one of the characters puts it: "*Nekem az új fejedelem nem különösen tetszik; ifju, az igaz, tehát még sok válhatik belőle: István vagy Zsigmond, mint a szerencse adja.*"

To insist upon the name as a signifier (and in particular the historical name) is to violate the prescriptive realism attributed to the genre and to call in question the relation of words to things in the historical milieu. When the ancestors' names emerge from the past, they represent certain values, features, principles, events, fates, actions, among which the first name makes a difference: "*gyáva vég sorjadéka vagy azon kevély törzsöknek, mely Istvánban érte el magasságát, s mióta az ledölt, nyomorult beteges gallyakat hajt (...) egy második Zsigmond, ki Kornis Boldizsárnéban, Bátori Erzsébetet vélt találni.*" The common core of the names, "Bátori", contains every meaning at the same time, no matter that their origins might be temporally divergent. The name as a linguistic unit includes its all time bearers, its meaning implies all the meanings ever attributed to it. Consequently, the last Bátori articulates the voices of all his ancestors: "*mivel bátyánkat Zsigmondot, ki nemzetségét gazdagitotta, s Bátori Erzsébetet merte emlegetni, s bennem nem csak a fejedelmet sértette meg, hanem Bátorit, s ez egy Bátorinál több!*" The relation between names and individuals is reversed. The last Bátori does not possess his name as an arbitrary signifier, but he is possessed by it. Besides, the notion of family tree as a trope is posited as a disfiguring component: "*vált a szép növénykirály helyett, összecsomódzott bokor belőle.*" When the narrator describes the last Bátori as a knot, as a non-organic entity in the process of descent, the text suggests that the last link in the genealogical chain ends the growing of the family-tree and the process of interpreting the tradition as well. The novel interprets the notion of heritage in such a way that it reveals that it is not a property, but rather a deficiency, a branch of errors and of distinct levels which threaten the uncertain position of the inheritor: "*árulás! és mindig árulás! Istenemre nem fogtok Zsigmondra találni bennem, ki minden nyakaztatás után megszaladt.*"

The plausibility of genealogical thinking appears to be ironically ambiguous even on a thematic level. In the end of the novel, it is eventually revealed that the minion of the prince, as an illegitimate child, belongs to the Bátori-family as well. Consequently, it becomes undecideable, whom the title signifies. The novel ends when Gábor Bátori dies, but the presence of his minion resists the attempts to identify the title with the main character. It is impossible to tell when the narrative, to which the title alludes, actually ends.

What does the genealogical way of thinking imply, then, according to Jósika's novel? In the beginning it is to depict the decline of a powerful family. But the meaning of the title is scattered in the network of the family name, which, as the presence of the minion shows, has no safe boundaries. The text eventually questions the validity of the genealogical treatment of the past.

After these short readings it is appropriate to draw a comparison between the romantic and the contemporary author. The processes of genealogical identification are systematically subverted in both texts. History is not just named in words but is brought into existence in words, in names. Let us, however, be circumspect about making too close an equation. It is easy to recognize that while in *The last Bátori* the narrator is not involved in the figurative game, in *Harmonia caelestis* the figuration of genealogy becomes established on the level of the speaker: "*én nem rokonságban állok a családommal, hanem része vagyok, az vagyok, én vagyok*" (616) ("I am not related to my family, I am a member of it, I am it, it is me").

In the romantic work it is the narrated that suffers the ambiguities of genealogy, but the identity of the narrator's voice is not questioned. In *Harmonia caelestis* the genealogical heritage is exposed to arbitrary substitutions. In Jósika's text, the authority of the tradition is not questioned but employed to understand the last inheritor. The last member of the genealogical chain, Gábor Bátori, is unable to modify the heritage he receives. On the other hand, the narrator in Esterházy's novel does increase, supplement and renew the possible meanings of the genealogical network. In Jósika's novel, the interpretations of the hero are dynamic in the sense that they constantly move within the genealogical repertoire, but the repertoire itself is taken for granted. The meanings are interchangeable within the genealogical repertoire, but the elements of the substitutions do not change their meanings. The play with the meanings takes place within the tradition, but it does not play with the tradition itself. In Jósika's work the meanings, hidden in the family name, are not rearrangeable even retrospectively. In Esterházy's piece the whole network is substitutable – at least it is hard to learn at which point it is and at which point it is not. Although, when in *Harmonia caelestis* the narrator announces that "*olyan erős a név, hogy eltakar engem*" ("the name is so powerful that it covers me"), the reader may touch upon an experience that both texts share. In *Harmonia caelestis* the name as a void invites and refuses at the same time the

efforts of filling it, while in *The last Bátori* the pre-established meanings attributed to the names fill the linguistic space opened by the descendant, depriving him of a genuine identity. While in the Romantic text inheritance was a threat, in the recent novel the disinheritance is actual and felt as such.

Genealogy, as we have been told by Nietzsche and Foucault, provides means to undermine idealistic meanings, historical *telos*, the cult of origin. Reading Jósika's text, it becomes clear that the romantic attempt to seek the beginning was accompanied with effects that laid bare the ambiguities and eventually the ambivalence of origin-centered thinking. It was revealed as early as the "invention" of origin in Romanticism, that the investigation of descent is incapable of founding itself. To conclude, one might assert that genealogy perhaps in the novel by Esterházy deliberately, in the novel by Jósika undercutting the very unifying action it aspires, shatters what one might think to be unmovable, takes apart what one might imagine as unified, reveals the heterogeneity of what one might think to be identical.

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