

# The representation of the 1989 regime change in contemporary Hungarian prose texts

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

Received: October 4, 2022 • Accepted: November 23, 2022

Published online: January 18, 2023

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### ABSTRACT

A fundamental segment of contemporary Hungarian prose literature has attempted to represent and textually portray the change in political regimes which took place in 1989. The dictatorship, the totalitarian system and the subsequent transition period proved to be excellent raw material; resulting in a very different kind of prose which, when compared to previous representations of Transylvania, elicits attention on the one hand by being distinctly separate from the assumption of an ideological role, and on the other hand by creating the given linguistic and fictional space through continuous transition(s), (inter-ethnic) in-betweenness and the relevance of otherness.

### KEYWORDS

transition narratives, regime change, histories of dictatorship, interstitiality

One of the defining strands of contemporary Hungarian prose literature can be distinguished on the basis of the narrativity and circumscribability of the transition or ‘the Turn’, as it is known, and the narratives that attempted to represent linguistically the historical/social turn of 1989 in Romania, in other words the regime change, form a defining layer of this strand.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A different paper could be based on a comparison of Hungarian-language prose works with the Romanian cinematographic “new wave” that produced excellent films and which gave rise to stage productions and images featuring the period of the regime change in Romania – referred to as the “Golden Age” (Epoca de aur), and the transition that followed.

The dictatorship, the totalitarian regime and the subsequent transition period proved to be excellent raw material; many outstanding prose works have been published since the middle of the 2000's and have run to several editions (sometimes revised and rewritten).

These re-presentations of Transylvania feature a series of attempts at retelling and presentability, with the caveat that, according to my belief, a “literary region” cannot be delimited by the birthplace or place of residence of certain authors, but may be defined instead by the texts that construct it linguistically.

The works in question may, of course, be interpreted only by taking into account poetic indicators. These texts, however, form a coherent corpus that offers a web of meaning and interpretation of social, anthropological and cultural references and relations through which a geopoetic system is formed. The referential textual markers, the geocultural idioms and the musealising figures create a prose ensemble whose volumes are linked to a *specific* space, in other words to constructions of spatial relations and relational spaces that are manifested in transition and in interstitiality. “Transition both evokes [...] the coordinate system of spatiality, since it describes a change of state by means of one of the most frequently used verbs for movement, but it is also linked to a family of concepts (‘temporary’, ‘transitory’, ‘temporal’) that crystallize along the dimension of temporality, reflecting a kind of temporary cultural/social state of short duration.”<sup>2</sup> The prose works belonging to this group have strong spatial formation indicators, but at the same time the time-coordinate system is also decisive: the point of reference is the events of 1989 in Romania, and the temporality of the works is valid in relation to and in the determination of these events.<sup>3</sup>

A prose movement, outstanding in its otherness in comparison to the earlier, “expired” Transylvanian narratives, elicits attention by being distinctly different from the assumption of an ideological role that had been imposed on literature for decades, from the baseness of representative literature, and by creating the given linguistic and fictional space through continuous transition(s), (inter-ethnic) in-betweenness and the relevance of otherness.

In my interpretations I pay particular attention to the geocultural aspects which I discuss mainly with reference to Kornélia Faragó's geocultural theories,<sup>4</sup> since it is important to see how decisive the language of objects and concepts is for the understanding of the text, and whether it is (also) comprehensible to those who are outside the socialisation and spatial perspective of the novel, which markedly presents a set of geocultural constraints. At the same time, a relevant attribute of the novels I explore is their abstraction from the concrete. Although the technique of relativising prose poetics used typically by Bodor, Láng, Dragomán, Papp or Vida is less characteristic in a good part of these novels,<sup>5</sup> the recurring topos of the totalitarian regime set in specific timelines and with strong topographical markers is a constant in these stories. The space

<sup>2</sup>Zsolt, SZIJÁRTÓ, *Az átmenetiség jelentősége – közelítések egy elmosódott fogalomhoz = Médiumok, történetek, használatok – Ünnepi tanulmánykötet a 60 éves Szajbély Mihály tiszteletére [The Significance of Transience – Approaches to a Blurred Concept. Mediums, Stories, Usages. A Festive Publication in Honour of Mihály Szajbély for his 60th Birthday]*. Pusztai, Bertalan (ed.). Szeged, Szegedi Tudományegyetem Kommunikáció és Médiatudományi Tanszék, 2012, 327.

<sup>3</sup>See: Imre József BALÁZS, *Hungarian Stories of the Regime Change:Voices and Perspectives*, *Porównania* 2 (27), 2020, 127–139.

<sup>4</sup>Kornélia, FARAGÓ, *A viszonyosság alakzatai [Formations of Reciprocity]*. Forum Könyvkiadó, 2009.

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed explanation see: Éva, BÁNYAI, *Térképek, névtérképek, határidentitások*, Kolozsvár, Komp-Press, 2011.



of fear, vulnerability (to power) and insecurity appear, and in the representation of all this, body poetics is also given an important and prominent role.

Further, there is a clear poetic relevance in the novels I have studied to the way in which memories are constructed from mosaics and shreds and the way in which they assume structure, materialising in the language of the writings, and embodied in various linguistic-poetic forms. Fragmented, corrective linguistic schemata or sentences often flow through numerous pages and also problematise the question of the narration and/or the untellable character of the historical Turn in question.

These stories are brought together by the attempts to tell them, even though the existence and the existence-changing role, the paramount importance of this particular Turn, i.e. the key event of 1989 in Romania, an “event” still undefinable due to its indefiniteness, is unquestionable. The Great Story is untellable, it can only be put together from mosaics, shards, fragments of memory (at the same time, the very act of putting it together, of assembling it, is also questionable). This can be linked to one of the most prominent features of certain novels which I consider relevant: the use of the child/adolescent perspective of the narrators, which represents the historical, social and sexual turn(s) they undergo from their own life-turning point of view.

In the case of most prose works, the definability of chronotopic coordinates is an important feature of textual constitution (to narrow this down: in most cases it is clearly possible to determine that the textual space is constituted by a Transylvanian city in Romania and the time period narrated by the novels may be narrowed down to the 1980’s, while the Turn is the post-communist transition), and therefore the co-texts, the influx of external worlds into the texts, also determine the context of the textual world.

A given literary text is “read differently by those who have a communicative memory of the time and space captured by the text, at least part of that time, and in whom each name, concept and object opens up a segment of a past, internal world – by readers who can read into it their own history, their own past questions. It is understood in an entirely different way by those others who read it in the absence of such auto-biographical memory, and whose questions are more recent, conceived at the time of reading”.<sup>6</sup> The geocultural narrative has an impact on the differentiation of understanding: the use of different linguistic and material attributes creates distinct, space-bound narratives and interpretations. In other words, they are interpreted differently by those inside and outside the cultural language boundaries. One of the attributes of these texts is the way in which they become museal: objects and various immaterial artefacts or “cultural collecting mosaics”,<sup>7</sup> understood as cultural signs, receive a textual organising function. Thus, the transition from ritual coherence to textual coherence<sup>8</sup> is also brought about by these cultural museum items. The presence of these textual sites also influences the role of the poetics of memory, i.e. forces the reader to adopt various strategies of reading together. The poetics of

<sup>6</sup>Kornélia, FARAGÓ, *Geo-anarchikus tériesség, néma történelem = Idő(m)értékek, kontextusok: Írások Molnár Szabolcs 65. születésnapjára [Geo-anarchic spatiality, silent history. Tempi and Contexts – Writings for the 65th Birthday of Szabolcs Molnár]*. Edited by Bányai, Éva, SZONDA, Szabolcs. Bukarest–Sepsiszentgyörgy, RHT Kiadó, 2008, 112–113. (Emphasis in the original.)

<sup>7</sup>FARAGÓ, *A viszonyosság alakzatai*, 16.

<sup>8</sup>Jan ASSMANN, *A kulturális emlékezet [Cultural Remembrance]*, Budapest, Atlantisz Könyvkiadó, 1999.



recognition is evident here. These things, these objects, these non-material artefacts are not only parts of space, but are themselves geocultural spaces.<sup>9</sup>

What is it that gives the specificity and identity of belonging to a cultural area in geocultural narratives – at the same time as the differences? On the one hand, there is the distinctive mark of national, ethnic separation (Hungarian versus Romanian, but extended to the spatial concepts of Central and Eastern Europe – it could just as well be Slovak, Serbian, Ukrainian etc.), and on the other hand, there is a kind of “regional spirit” from the perspective of others observing from the outside. This is a kind of unknowable spatial formation, inaccessible as a cultural space from a single national perspective. Thus, in the narratives discussed here, space, region and “land” are not expressions of the essence of national identity, belonging or self-identity, but rather of a cultural space, a multiple, hybrid identity formed through various relations and relationships. They are attributes of a certain border-region identity, into which cultural meanings and values are encoded. Thus, space becomes indispensable for the understanding of culturally interpreted landscapes<sup>10</sup>, since they are fundamental attributes of geocultural narratives – it is in fact through the study of space that the border and the periphery come into the foreground.

In my interpretation 1989 plays a special role as the spatial time of transition, as a “boundary stone” and a “deadline”. This time, however, is not a factor in itself, but rather, based upon its “local value”, a time representation of historical/social changes and transitions in the Central and Eastern European *space*. The formation and research of *sites of memory*,<sup>11</sup> the compulsion to archive, the recording of traces, the musealisation, the turning into space of the past and the delimitation of the context of relations all seem to be urgent and irreplaceable tasks. This set of communal obligations comes in addition to individual compulsion and the redefinition of identity through the revival of “individual” history. “The duty of memory makes everyone a historian of themselves”,<sup>12</sup> writes Pierre Nora, and I believe that this is what I keep discovering in the novels I studied, which attempt to record the traces of memory, the totalitarianism of their recent past. In addition to the layers of individual and family history, they act as manifestations and literary-fictional constructions of public and private histories in Romania/Transylvania, of the seemingly untellable, ritualised histories of collective and private memory.

Individual memory, formed at the unique intersections of various collective memories, is selective, and therefore fragile and incomplete, since there are as many memories as there are groups.<sup>13</sup> Pierre Nora also states that “memory is by its nature multiple and multiplicative, collective, plural, yet individualized”.<sup>14</sup> It is the interplay of such individualised memories and imaginings that has produced these excellent prose works, each of which is autonomous and distinct, yet can be conceived as a corpus of texts to be read together with the others.

<sup>9</sup>Cf.: FARAGÓ, *A viszonzóság alakzatai*.

<sup>10</sup>W. J. T. MITCHELL, *Birodalmi táj: Tézisek a tájképről [Imperial Landscape – Theses on Landscapes]*, Café Babel, 1991/1, 31.

<sup>11</sup>Pierre NORA, *Emlékezet és történelem között. A helyek problematikája [Between Memory and History. Les Lieux de Mémoire]*. Ford. K. HORVÁTH Zsolt. Múlt és Jövő 2003/4., 3.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Maurice Halbwachst, quoted by NORA, op. cit., 3.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.



Imaginations of the past and memory are a matter of construction rather than of reproduction,<sup>15</sup> and therefore the textual worlds are also constituted as complementary and reinforcing relations of imagination and memory.

The spaces of memory are constituted by relations: memory is formed along the relation between the one who remembers and the object of the memory. Spatial relations and the spaces of relations are subject to constant change in the spaces between remembering and forgetting; it is the space that creates the relations (temporal, personal, collective etc.) and these relations are manifested in space.

Andrea Tompa's excellent novel, *A hóhér háza*<sup>16</sup> (*The Hangman's House*), which has also been published in a second, revised edition, belongs to the series of prose texts which, in addition to the moments of rewriting and transcribing, of unfinishable text formation, constant transience and temporary permanence, also present the change of experience in the transition between spatial and historical shifts. The textual pillar of the novel is the memory of the events of late December 1989, and the concluding chapter of the work, evoking Christmas 1989, embeds the narrative of the Turn into the moment of coming of age which marked this period. At the same time, the novel is a panoramic panopticon of the last century viewed through the lense of the social, cultural and historical changes of Kolozsvár [Cluj] and the narrator's family history. To quote Alain Badiou, the whole twentieth century is "nothing but a transition, a threshold that can be moved but never crossed".<sup>17</sup> Andrea Tompa's novel exemplifies this with its panorama of the twentieth century: the unending, constant moving of thresholds, the endless transition. In the space of in-betweenness, contemplation is structured by the contradictory processes which become tangible in the description of the change of empire and the change of regime. A favourite and repeatedly used formula in transition narratives, especially those depicting the turn of events in a totalitarian regime, is to mobilise a child/adolescent narrator. The point of view of the adolescent girl, monogrammed T. A., who assumes the role of the narrator of the autobiography, constructs the novel's perspective of memory, as the narrative of the family and of the wider and narrower society is shaped by the past, by the temporary fixations and shifting movements of constant transitions and by the sometimes indecipherable versions and changes of history.

The third person singular narrator is also in transition, and as in most of the novels, the gender narrative perspective of the multiple (social, gender, ethnic) minority is prominent. The question is why novelists are so fond of child/adolescent narrators, especially when they bring a dictatorship or a repressive system to life. The totalitarian system itself regards its subjects as children, or at least does not consider them as adults, and adults also become quasi-children in their relationship with the system, the majority being unable to grow up, feeling the need to be guided, and therefore a relationship of dependency develops between the system and the individuals that belong to it.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Gábor, GYÁNI, *Emlékezés, emlékezet és a történelem elbeszélése* [*Memory, Remembrance and the Narration of History*], Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó, 2000.

<sup>16</sup>Andrea, TOMPA, *A hóhér háza. Történetek az Aranykorról* [*The Hangman's House. Histories about the Golden Age*], Pozsony, Kalligram, 2010, and TOMPA Andrea, *A hóhér háza* [*The Hangman's House*], Budapest, Libri, 2014.

<sup>17</sup>Alain BADIOU, *A század* [*The Century*]. Translated by MIHÁNCsik, Zsófia. Budapest, Typotex Kiadó, 2010, 51.



“Transition is a richer sphere of meaning than change in the sense that it intensifies the notion of purpose in its meaning of *directional* movement. A purpose (in its passage-like meanings, the purpose of reaching the other side, the other shore) is something that seems to be constantly moving and disappearing. The disappearance of the idea of a purpose which takes place in the meantime renders this in-betweenness prolonged and, in a Central and Eastern European context, downright normal, turning the transitory into near-permanent. It is mainly the loss of purpose, the sense of the permanence of transience, the state-like stagnation of the in-between times that has the power to turn the public mood into general lethargy. The future horizon that is incorporated into the stream of experience could make the various models of movement dynamic through the fulfilment of hopes, wills and resolutions, but the persistence of transience gives way to static attitudes, to an unbearable sense of “going nowhere”,<sup>18</sup> as remarked by Kornélia Faragó. This statement is also important because the prose texts that reconstruct the Turn, i.e. the change of regimes in Romania, are generally characterised by an initial reflective uncertainty that points to transition. The characters who experience the “events” *in medias res* are transposed from an anxious uncertainty, imbued with fear, into a hopeful uncertainty, in the tense space of story and narrative.

Similarly to Andrea Tompa’s narrative, Zsolt Láng’s novel *A föld állatai (Animals of the Earth)*, Volume IV of the *Bestiárium Transylvaniae* series, presents the period before and after the Romanian Turn from the perspective of a teenage girl of 17 or 18 called Bori. This time the space of the novel is mapped by the city of Szatmár [Satu Mare], which, like the space of Kolozsvár, is constructed in the stratified, heterotopic historical/social transitions and turns of the past centuries. This work of fiction, which includes Transylvanian literary anecdotes and unspoken stories from the public and private spheres, also exemplifies the inescapability of the narrative: these narratives are embedded in school stories, as a lesson and a cautionary tale for “the generations to learn from”. The school is a highlighted transitional space, but also a system that maps society on the micro and macro levels alike. It acts as an important and decisive site of transitional narratives, a space of the first experience of the awakening of children’s thought and the split consciousness that is common in totalitarian societies – a space of the absurdity of double vision/thinking, characterised by the failure of communication and the rise of aggression.

Another prose work published in the same period is Sándor Zsigmond Papp’s novel *Semmi kis életek*<sup>19</sup> (*Trifling Little Lives*), which also saw an amended and revised edition. It pushes the events of 1989 into the space of the absurd, the unreplayable and the untellable, with a foreign TV crew shooting a scene, indicating that the discrepancy between the time of events and the time of “narration”, the time of retelling, becomes irresolvable. The novel presents everyday life under the Romanian totalitarian regime of the last century, the reign of fear, uncertainty and unpredictability, within the restricted space of a Transylvanian town.

Márta Józsa’s essay-novel, *Amíg a nagymami megkerül*<sup>20</sup> (*Until Grandmother Turns Up*), is connected to the author’s childhood in Kolozsvár and its continuations. The novel does not specifically aim to present the transition and ‘the Turn’, but to mark its antecedents and partly

<sup>18</sup>Faragó, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup>Sándor Zsigmond, PAPP. *Semmi kis életek [Trifling Little Lives]*, Budapest, Libri, 2011.

<sup>20</sup>Márta, JÓZSA, *Amíg a nagymami megkerül [Until Grandmother Turns Up]*, Budapest, Noran, 2007.



its consequences in the town of Kolozsvár of the seventies and eighties and the years that followed, along with their micro- and macro-social aspects.

Péter Demény's novel about Kolozsvár, entitled *Visszaforgatás*<sup>21</sup> (*Reversal*), can be read as a narrative of spatial experience. In the novel, Imre, a journalist who has entered the age of Christ, tells the story of his life with subjective and bone-deep live dissection. "Unlike many people, I believe that prose does not necessarily need to be impersonal [...]"<sup>22</sup> the narrator confesses; and indeed, s/he does not only spatialise the inner relations of their own life, but also the world around them, both horizontally and vertically. Like *A hóhér háza*, Demény's novel can be read as a key novel, and any reader with a certain amount of local knowledge will easily identify the characters despite the fact that their names have been changed. This novel, too, is a manifestation of the collective and private discourses and stories of Transylvania and, within that, of Kolozsvár, in addition to the layers of individual and family history. The spatial time of the events and the plot of *Visszaforgatás* evoke the Kolozsvár of the eighties and nineties, with its multiple stratifications, its transitional relations, its cultural, linguistic and social heterogeneity. The narrator, whose aim is to understand himself, reveals anomalies of the system through his family history, by looking back over several generations and depicting the micro- and macro-histories and relational spaces of Kolozsvár. The narrator's childhood and youth are so powerfully defined by this space that, despite its negative features and incongruities, he finds it inconceivable to live elsewhere for any length of time. The space depicted also varies according to and in relation to memory and the nuances of the subjectivity experienced.

Although not a part of the main narrative strand of the novel, the representation of the world of the *Securitate* is prominent here, as in all the novels mentioned above. The ubiquitous Romanian state security system, which moved everything and controlled everything from the background, did not disappear after the regime change, but used the transitional period to transpose its own structure, exploiting the old forms to integrate itself into the transitional society. One of the most striking examples of this is provided in Chapter III of *Semmi kis életek*; another example is one of the best pieces, *Lelkiismeretünk bekötőútjain*<sup>23</sup> (*On the Gravel Roads of our Conscience*) in Róbert Csaba Szabó's collection of short stories entitled *Temetés este tízkor* (*Funeral at 10:00 p.m.*), an excellent portrait of the transition period following the change of regime. The people of an unnamed village are terrified by the 'bodywork' of a security officer lynched in the revolution twenty years earlier, a black Dacia car that frequently appears out of nowhere and tears through the streets. A world of silences, deliberate oblivion and lies unfolds as the elusive, yet existent spectre haunts the village's souls, forming an eternal, never-ending transition. Another of Róbert Csaba Szabó's novels, *Alakváltók*<sup>24</sup> (*Shape Shifters*), is a partisan story embedded in the narrative of 1989 which points to the endless shapeshifting of the *Securitate*, the state security organisation of the time, ongoing over decades, and the permanence of the transition.

<sup>21</sup>Péter, DEMÉNY, *Visszaforgatás [Reversal]*, Kolozsvár, Koinónia, 2006.

<sup>22</sup>DEMÉNY, *op. cit.*, 13.

<sup>23</sup>Róbert Csaba, SZABÓ, *Temetés este tízkor [Funeral at 10:00 p.m.]*, Csíkszereda, Bookart, 2011, 77.

<sup>24</sup>Róbert Csaba, SZABÓ, *Alakváltók [Shape Shifters]*, Budapest, Jelenkor, 2016.





György Dragomán's novel *Máglya*<sup>25</sup> (*The Bone Fire*) can also be classified as a transitional narrative. Through the story of Emma, an orphaned girl, we learn via a first-person narrative about the conditions after *the* revolution or a certain revolution. As in the novels mentioned earlier, this prose narrative is also, to some extent, a coming-of-age story, for by the end of the novel the thirteen-year-old adolescent girl almost has an insight into the system— which is (would be) no small thing – but that does not mean that she knows everything. Indeed, this may well be one of the central questions of the novel: what is the relationship between knowledge, understanding, truth/lies. What can and what do the characters do with their relative freedom, with the past, with their memories, with the near and distant past; how much are their actions influenced by the events of the past? In *Máglya*, as in the novels of Andrea Tompa and Zsolt Láng, the Holocaust theme, the horrors of the deportation of the Jews and the impact of all of this on the individual and his or her subsequent actions, is a markedly present theme.

The sense of transience in *Máglya* is provided not only by the chronotopic coordinates that are indicated and inferred, but also by one of the layers of the novel which sometimes applies, somewhat questionable, magical elements. The act of face-depiction through divination from coffee grounds at the beginning of the novel highlights the way in which various layers of tradition, confluence and transitions are used to construct the text in connection with the emergence of the confluent facial lines of grandmother and mother Emma. Dragomán's *Máglya* is also a questioning of magical realism through the events of the last pages, Emma's transformation, her maturation, and thus the highlighting of transience, as she becomes cynical about what is happening around her, and above all about her own "omniscience", all of which gives room to doubt and imagination. This act of questioning also authenticates the existence of the otherwise dubious magical figures, as the entire text of the novel was written in Emma's voice and represents her imagination. The magical events that take place in her mind are shaped in the space of fiction, a simulacrum of the real being drawn from her fantasy world.

Some of the prose texts we are discussing are also family novels, which in themselves illustrate the transition through the succession of the generations. In many cases it is the grandmothers who play the role of the wise bonding force and conflict resolver (but also conflict-raiser) of the family, even if they are lost after a while and never found again.<sup>26</sup> However, it is also they who bear witness to the great transitions of the century: they who had lived through Trianon and been present at the celebrations of Horthy's entry into Kolozsvár, they who had experienced the enforcement of the Jewish laws, who had suffered under the totalitarian regime and who are the last to believe in the possibility of change, of potential regime change amid the euphoric atmosphere of Christmas 1989. In Andrea Tompa's novel two dominant grandmother-figures with strong personalities,<sup>27</sup> who had followed completely different, yet in some ways still very similar paths in a space affected by the historical "big times" and whose life paths had been strongly influenced by the historical space shifts, now bend down together for a flash of a moment over their grandchild's cradle, only to go down their separate paths once more and now most definitively part. In Zsolt Láng's novel, the post-revolutionary

<sup>25</sup>György, DRAGOMÁN, *Máglya [The Bone Fire]*, Budapest, Magvető, 2014.

<sup>26</sup>See: JÓZSA, *Amíg a nagymami megkerül*.

<sup>27</sup>The figure of one of the grandmothers unfolds in Tompa's second novel entitled *Fejtől s lábtól. Kettő orvos Erdélyben [Top to Tail. Two Doctors in Transylvania]* (2014).





epilogue concluding the novel, crammed into a single sentence, features the grandmother, the questioning of euphoria and the experience of bodily passing. In Péter Demény's novel, too, the wise grandmother who forgives but never forgets, the ancestor who had lived through, seen and experienced so much, is found in the role of carrying on the family tradition. György Dragomán's *Máglya* is the most powerful mobilisation of the grandmother as a figure who takes a significant role. Emma is placed in a transitional space: first put in an orphanage after her parents' fatal accident, she is later taken "home" by her grandmother, to gain life experience, after more or less growing into an adult, in the transitional phase following the change of regime, the trying period after the "revolution".

One chapter of *A hóhér háza* is linked to the dresses of great-grandmothers, grandmothers and grandchildren; while another, outstanding section of the novel describes historical turns and transitions by presenting the changes of space in twentieth-century Kolozsvár through evoking performances of *Hamlet* from different periods.

The grandmothers in these novels are the greatest resisters against the system – for one thing, they refuse to take note of name changes, especially of street names, the most blatant signs of the change of space. Naming relations are also important elements of geocultural narrative in general, but in these novels the names are indicators not of permanence, but of transition, transformation, changeability (or the permanence of transition), of permanent transformation through the symbolic occupation of space.

We could cite numerous examples of related irony from these novels which also allow us to compound a map of the town by superimposing the layers of the spaces evoked, since spaces with apparently similar structures are in a state of constant transformation. The names of some of the characters in the novel also belong in this category, and in addition to the names of spaces, the name of the grandfather also indicates the unfixable character of identity. In Andrea Tompa's novel, László Kühn becomes Kun, Kohn and then Vasile Kohn in the course of a century; János Asztalos turns into Ion Astaloş in Péter Demény's novel; in Zolt Láng's novel some of the characters' names are changed from Vizi to Vizi, Karikás to Caricaş "(pronounced as *caricash*)" and Deák becomes Deacu "(pronounced as *deahku*)". In this case, the lack of historical and cultural "background knowledge" is compounded by a (possible) lack of knowledge of the Romanian language, since the pronunciation, i.e. the sound of these names is (roughly) identical to the original name, but this interpretation is not provided by "reading" them according to Hungarian grammar.<sup>28</sup> These transitional names<sup>29</sup> not only denominate, but also move associative spaces and create relations – they give rise not to a national identity, but to a geo-cultural narrative. For geoculturally cohesive spaces can never achieve the fixation of certain names; I am referring here not only to Adam Bodor's pseudonyms in *Sinistra körzet* (*Sinistra district*) where the possibility of identification is called into question from the very beginning of the novel, given that everyone uses a pseudonym received from the ruling power and even those in power change their names (sometimes unjustifiably and misleadingly), but also to toponyms. Besides the significance of personal names and street names, place names in

<sup>28</sup>This is one reason why the narration by Láng "helps" by offering instructions in brackets. In a remarkable instance of irony and parody, which defines the entire text of the novel, the text instructs us to pronounce the unpronounceable *Dacian* (emphasis by me, É.B.) sentence "as you like".

<sup>29</sup>Demény's novel mentions the fact that a potential further change of empire would turn Ion Astaloş back into János Asztalos.



general have undergone multiple changes over the decades and even centuries. The problem of name changes and the use of double or multiple names also reinforces the presence of a 'borderline' identity of a kind – the unfixable nature and elusiveness of identity.

The prose collections listed form a narrow, but prominent layer of the narrative strand in the literary construction of the transition and 'the Turn'. Comparative analysis has provided an opportunity to study the genre-constituting features of transition narratives and the systemic forms of the mechanisms of change.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

This work was supported by a grant of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Domus Grant, which is gratefully acknowledged.

