On Prose and Narrative

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On Prose and Narrative

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Preface

The present volume is divided into two main parts: the essays in the first part respond to challenges that spring from medieval and early modern literature, while the ones in the second part reflect on concerns in modern literature and literary theory. The first three chapters discuss the artistry of Dante and Boccaccio. First, we focus on Dante's *Vita Nuova* studying, on the one hand, the forms in which vision, imagination, and fantasy appear and also their different interpretations, and, on the other, we also intend to explore and interpret the connections between the spaces in *Vita Nuova*, and spaces and words in general. Chapter 3 addresses questions of genre theory in *Decameron* by Boccaccio: the two types of comic short stories Eichenbaum distinguished, generic and existential concepts of the short story cycle by Igor Smirnov, and the carnival theory of Mikhail Bakhtin. Based on these theoretical considerations, the chapter intends to explore narration as an act, and its rhetorical and poetic power in *Decameron*.

In the second part of the volume, the first chapter focuses on the post-modern theoretical question of writing/rewriting. It analyzes two novels, *Novecento* and *Silk* (*Seta*) by Alessandro Baricco, and the passages of classical literature that it recalls including the Ulysses episode from Canto 26 of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*, and the journeys of Marco Polo from a 12th century prose narrative available first in Old French then also in an Italian manuscript. Chapter 5 analyses the novel *Fatelessness* by Imre Kertész, the Nobel Laureate Hungarian author, relying on a significant essay, *Fragment of a Theory of Novel*, written by a more or less contemporaneous philosopher, Béla Hamvas, who was unreservedly neglected and silenced. Applying the theory of the double interpretation of reality, the ontological status of the novel, and the concepts of narrative identity and confessions to the study of Kertész' *Fatelessness* proves to be innovative and enlightening. Finally,

the last chapter discusses artistic forms relying on the ideas Bakhtin pre-sented in an early essay entitled *Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art*. This work briefly overviews the debate between Bakhtin and the Russian Formalists, which, in spite of all the injustice, proved to be productive, then it explains in detail the systematic concept of form that not only shapes its material but also fills it with content, and activates both the author-crea-tor and the recipient. Finally, it point out some parallelisms between the Bakhtinian concept of form and the ideas of contemporaneous scholars including Bergson, Vygotsky and Gadamer, as well as some 20th century Hungarian thinkers e.g. Attila József, Lajos Fülep or Sándor Sík.

Eventually readers may wonder why all these essays on diverging topics and different authors are published within the same volume. Literary form provides us with a sensible answer: all the works discussed in this volume are primarily prosaic in form including even *Vita Nuova*, so studying all of them from this aspect is reasonable. Generic arguments are even stronger because all these texts are "novel-like," and even Bakhtin is known to re-strict his theoretical investigations to novels or prose texts. However, in our opinion, the most important unifying force in this volume is the shared an-alytical approach based on discursive poetics and genre theory, which pro-vides the understanding of literary texts from different ages and cultures with a shared interpretive ground based on recognizably similar principles.

PART I.

Medieval and Early Modern Narratives: Dante and Boccaccio

From Image to Word. Vision, Imagination and Fantasy in Dante's *Vita Nuova*

In his commentary to the 1996 critical edition of the *Vita Nova*, which he spells without the diphthong, Guglielmo Gorni praises the function of *vision, imagination* and *fantasy* in Dante's work.[1] At the same time, he clearly differentiates between the role of *vision* and the other imaginative activities of the narrator protagonist. From this point of view, it may be interesting to "investigate" the role of those passages that are dominated by a visual, imaginative or fantastic "phenomenon," or better to say, manifestation. For this reason, we are first citing all the relevant parts of the text using Roman and Arabic numbers to refer to the traditional chapters and the Gorninian paragraphs, respectively.

1. III. (1.) E pensando di lei, mi sopragiunse uno soave sonno, ne lo quale mi apparve una maravigliosa *visione*: che me parea vedere ne la mia camera una nebula di colore di fuoco, dentro a la quale io discernea una figura d'uno segnore di pauroso aspetto a chi la guardasse […]

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1 Guglielmo Gorni, "La *Vita Nova* nell'opera di Dante," in Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nova,* ed. Guglielmo Gorni, (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1996), IX-XLVIII, esp. XIX-XXIII.

E mantenente cominciai a pensare, e trovai che l'ora ne la quale m'era questa *visione* apparita, era la quarta de la notte stata, sì che appare manifestamente ch'ella fue la prima ora de le nove ultime ore de la notte.

visione

2. IX. (4.) E però lo dolcissimo segnore, lo quale mi segnoreggiava per la vertù de la gentilissima donna, ne la mia *imaginazione* apparve come peregrino leggeramente vestito e di vili drappi. […] *A me parve* che Amore mi chiamasse, e dicessemi queste parole […] E dette queste parole, disparve questa mia *imaginazione* […]

immaginazione (parire)

3. XII. (5.) Avenne quasi nel mezzo de lo mio dormire che *me parve vedere* ne la mia camera lungo me sedere uno giovane vestito di bianchissime vestimenta, e pensando molto quanto a la vista sua, mi riguardava là ov'io giacea […]

[…] Ondo io ricordandomi, trovai che questa *visione* m'era apparita ne la nona ora del die […]

(In XIII: Appresso di questo soprascritta *visione* […])

visione (parire, vedere)

4. XV. (7) […] sì tosto com'io *imagino* la sua mirabile bellezza, sì tosto mi giugne uno desiderio de *vederla* […])

immaginazione (vedere)

5. XXIII. (14.) Così cominciando ad errare la mia *fantasia*, venni ch'io non sapea ove io mi fosse; e *vedere mi parea* donne andare scapigliate piangendo per via, maravigliosamente triste; e *pareami vedere* lo sole oscurare, sì che le stelle si mostravano di colore ch'elle mi faceano giudicare che piangessero; e *pareami* che li uccelli volando per l'aria cadessero morti, e che fossero grandissimi terremuoti.

E maravigliandomi in cotale *fantasia*, e paventando assai, *imaginai* alcuno amico che mi venisse a dire: «Or non sai? La tua mirabile donna è partita di questo secolo». Allora cominciai a piangere molto pietaosamente; e non solamente piangea *ne la imaginazione*, ma piangea con li occhi, bagnandoli di vere lagrime. *Io imaginava di guardare* verso lo cielo

[…] e fue sì forte la erronea *fantasia* […]
[…] e sì forte era la mia *imaginazione*
E parlandomi così, sì mi cessò la forte *fantasia* […]

(And see the reflection of the narrator protagonist in the next chapter, XXIV. (15.): "vana *imaginazione*")

fantasia, immaginazione (vedere, parire)

6. XXIV. (15.) […] mi giunse *un'imaginazione* d'Amore […]

immaginazione

7. XXXIX. (28.) […] quasi ne l'ora de la nona, una forte *imaginazione* in me, che mi parve vedere questa gloriosa Beatrice con quelle vestimenta sanguigne co le quali appariva prima a li occhi miei […]

immaginazione (parire, vedere)

8. XLII. (31.) Appresso questo sonetto appare a me una mirabile *visione*, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse piú degnamente trattare di lei.

visione (dire)

And there are at least two more passages in which the problem of the "image" is articulated. In the first, the narrator protagonist is drawing figures of angels remembering Beatrice, who has already died, while the second one obviously refers to the Biblical motif of Veronica's veil:

9. XXXIV. (23.) […] io mi sedea […] ricordandomi a lei, *disegnava* uno angelo sopra certe tovalette […]

[…] ritornaimi a la mia opera, cioè del *disegnare figure* d'angeli: e faccendo ciò, mi venne uno pensiero di *parole*, quasi per annovale, e scrivere a costoro li quali erano venuti a me; e dissi allora questo sonetto, lo quale comincia: *Era venuta*; lo quale ha due cominciamenti […]

disegnare, figure, parole (vedere, scrivere)

10. XL. (29.) […] in quello tempo che molta gente va per *vedere* quella *imagine* benedetta la quale Iesu Cristo lasciò a noi per essemplo de la sua bellissima *figura* […]

vedere, immagine, figura

In his essay, Gorni focuses on only the first two *visions* of the narrator protagonist. He convincingly argues that the "admirable vision" (*mirabile visione*) in the end of the work, which is interpreted by a large number of scholars as an allusion to Dante preparing for writing the *Divine Comedy*, differ in aim and character from the two first visions that appear in the narration as descriptions of the narrator protagonist's dreams. We accept the difference Gorni made and consider the last paragraph or chapter of the *Vita Nuova* as a metapoetic allusion to Dante, the author.

The first of the visions Gorni discusses in detail is from Chapter III (paragraph 1) when the narrator protagonist dreams that Cupid (Amor) brings the sleeping Beatrice in his arms to him, and Cupid wakes her up to make her eat the protagonist's heart. However, this vision is quite enigmatic; we know that it is a literary *topos*, and Gorni mentions the poetry of the Provencal G*uillem de Cabestany* as a possible source.[2] On the other hand, the act of eating the other's heart may also be interpreted as an event of uniting two persons. And the union between Dante as the protagonist and Beatrice constitutes the main topic and the aim of the whole work called *Vita Nuova*. Consequently, this initial vision takes the role of the catalyst that sets narration into motion.

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2   Gorni, "La *Vita Nova* nell'opera di Dante," XXXII.

At this point, it is worth considering that the structure of the *Vita Nuova* from a certain point of view resembles the composition of Classical or ancient narration. As Olga Freidenberg, a scholar of Ancient Greek literature, states narration has its origin in the *image*. She emphasizes that visions that represent Classical forms of narration and visionary stories are "purely visual, which testifies to the emergence of story from visual showing. In visionary stories the major narration (in the present tense) is suddenly interrupted by the creation in the form of a personal story of a picture of the future "seen" with his own eyes by the hero of the narration."[3] So the composition of Classical stories means a shift from "showing a vision" to narration, or more simply from images to words. The so called "I-story" is created by the image or images of the world, first in the form of ecphrasis and vision, which afterwards becomes narration.[4]

As for the concept of myth, we agree with Károly Kerényi and Mircea Eliade[5] who claim that images and symbols represent a special, not conceptual, not rational form of cognition. This revelation also seems to return in modern hermeneutic theory when Gottfried Boehm argues that the cognitive power of *deixis* lies in the act of showing: the shown object is seen as it is. The act of showing constructs a new space for cognition, the essence of which can be called *intentionality*.[6]

If the essence of Classical narration lies in showing a vision or an image seen by the storyteller, it can be identified with the exposition of Logos, as Frejdenberg writes. When the conceptual essence changes, narration loses its Logos nature.[7] In that moment narration remains like an image, but in

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3   Ольга Фрейденберг [Olga Freidenberg,], "Происхождение наррации," in *Миф и литература древности* (Екатеринбург: У-Фактория, 2008), 353-354. The English translation is cited from Olga Freidenberg, *Image and Concept: Mythopoetic Roots of Literature*, trans. Kevin Moss (Amsterdam: harwood academic publishers, 1997), 57.

4   Фрейденберг, "Происхождение наррации," 356.

5   Kerényi Károly, *Mitológia*, trans. Grácia Kerényi (Szukits, Budapest, 1998); Mircea Eliade, *Képek és jelképek*, trans. Kamocsay Ildikó (Európa, Budapest, 1997).

6   "Die Erkenntnis öffnende Kraft der Deixis wird am deutlichsten daran, dass der *gezeigte* Gegenstand *sich* zegit. Er wird »als solcher« (als er selbst) erkennbar. Das Zeigen, so stumm es geschehen mag, baut einen Erkenntnisraum auf, dessen wesentliches Kennzeichen Distanz (Intentionalität) ist." Gottfried Boehm, "Bildbeschreibung. Über die Grenzen von Bild und Sprache," in *Grenzen der Bildinterpretation*, ed. Michael R. Müller, Jürgen Raab, Hans-Georg Soeffner (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2014), 19-36.

7   Фрейденберг, "Происхождение наррации," 359-360.

the meantime it obtains a conceptual nature, which is revealed in the appearance of this *dual representation*, the representation of both past and present.

The *vision* interrupts narration and interprets its topic. Thus it results in conceptual generalization. The show of a vision gradually becomes a comparison and eventually a metaphor, rather than an allegory or a symbol.[8] Dante's *Vita Nuova* in this sense may exemplify the origin of allegory, symbol and, last but not least, the origin of metaphor.

Archaic narration emerges from atemporality. Narration as a modern concept appears when the past becomes separated from the present. The forms of atemporality of narration are the *frame* and the envisioned *image*.[9] The role of the image seems to be clear in Dante's work (it is enough to think about the two first visions or the images drawn by the narrator protagonist); and the role of frame is also easy to see if we consider Beatrice's two imaginary appearances in crimson garments both in the beginning and at the end of the book. Moreover, even the Latin citations in the beginning and at the end ("*Incipit vita nova*", "*qui est per omnia secula benedictus*") function as frames.

Classical narration is a mythical storytelling with distinctive characteristic features. One of these is that the story "speaks" about the hero, *who is the narrator himself.* The talk is centred on the narrator, personally, and on his acts and passive behaviours, victories and faults while direct speech begins to separate within itself indirect narration from absolved or experienced events.[10] Consequently, the image gradually becomes a *concept* in the process of narration.[11]

Before turning to the second vision of Dante as the narrator protagonist, it is worth considering the role of "explicit images" articulated in the text. The second one in Chapter XL (paragraph 29) does not describe but only mentions the famous image of Christ imprinted on Veronica's veil. In this passage, the word *image* realizes its archaic meaning as image means

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8   Фрейденберг, "Происхождение наррации," 354-355.
9   Фрейденберг, "Происхождение наррации," 353.
10   Фрейденберг, "Происхождение наррации," 346.
11   Фрейденберг, "Происхождение наррации," 364.

imitation, an exact copy of the "original", the "real thing".[12] As Mircea Eliade stresses, the word *imago* (*image*) is etymologically related to the word *imitor* that means 'imitate, reproduce'.[13] But, as it is well-known, this reproduction obtains a new character in the artistic work: the actual *mimesis* of reality becomes an illusory reflection of a real phenomenon. In the new phase of literature that succeeds mythological thinking, images do not aspire to follow "truly" the so called reality any more: the interpretive way of thinking becomes much more important. And, as Freidenberg emphasizes, its leads to generalization and the *appearance of the metaphor*:

> the former identity of meaning of the original and its transmission was replaced by the mere illusion of such identity, with an identity that "seemed" to the imagination […] The transfer of meaning could not have appeared if the concrete and real identity (the "way" really corresponding to the road) had not been forced to change into a seeming and abstract identity (the "way" in the sense of "course of thoughts").[14]

So in the arts *mimesis* obtains a new nature; it becomes the starting point to construct the "image" of the world which is already intentionally illusory and may "embrace" every visual form of reality.

After this theoretical argumentation the passages articulating the words *imagination* or "*I imagine(d)*" in Dante's work are read as signs of a double or metaphorical meaning i.e. signs of the narrator's creative poetic activity. Dante here renews the medieval genre *prosimetrum*, treating and explaining his own lyrical pieces, constructing an original and personal story not only about Beatrice, but, first of all, about himself. In the *Vita Nuova*, one can definitely distinguish the so called simplified *sujet*, inherited from the

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12 Ольга Фрейденберг [Frejdenberg, Olga], "Метафора," in *Миф и литература древности* (Екатеринбург: У-Фактория, 2008), 307. And almost the same idea is worded by Eco. See Umberto Eco, *Arte e bellezza nell'estetica medievale* (Bompiani, Milano, 1997), 160-161.

13 Eliade, *Képek és jelképek*, 24.

14 Фрейденберг, Ольга, *Метафора*, *op. cit.*, 308-310. The English translation is cited from Olga Freidenberg, "Metaphor," in *Image and Concept: Mythopoetic Roots of Literature*, trans. Kevin Moss (Amsterdam: harwood academic publishers, 1997), 31-32.

Middle Ages, from the original and personal poetic achievement.[15] The *cre-ative artist* appeared towards the end of the Middle Ages as a sort of *alter deus*, as it is often claimed. Umberto Eco also sees a new approach to the artistic process, citing lines 49-54 from Chapter XXIV in the *Purgatory*, where the poet declares that he records what Cupid dictates to him word by word. For Eco this gesture reveals a brand new consideration of the act of invention:[16]

> (Ma dì s'i' veggio qui colui che fore
> Trasse le nove rime, cominciando
> *'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore'.*)
> E io a lui: "I' mi son un, che quando
> Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo
> Ch'e' dita dentro vo significando.[17]

Thus the opinion worded by John Took seems very considerable when he directly describes the *Vita Nuova* as "Dante's characteristic tendency towards self-organization" by means of "self-interrogation" and "self-edu-cation in and through the words".[18] And that is why we cannot agree with Leo Spitzer who emphasizes in one of his studies on the *Vita Nuova* that poetic fantasies are only works of memory i.e. reproductive activities. In his opinion, Dante's accounts of visions should be conceived only as acts of repetition without the liberty of poetry that is being born *here and now*.[19]

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15 For the relationship between the collective, inherited and the "original", creative, or innovative poetic activity in general, see Veselovsky's famous study on the possibilities of historical poetics written at the end of the 19th century: Александр Веселовский [Alexandr Veselovsky], "Поэтика сюжетов," in *Историческая поэтика* (Ленинград: Наследие, 1940), 493-501.

16 Eco, *Arte e bellezza nell'estetica medievale,* 178-179.

17 *Purg.*, XXIV, 49-54. (Dante and Bonagiunta).

18 John F. Took, *Dante: Lyric Poet and Philosopher. An Introduction to the Minor Works*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 43-44.

19 "L'attività fantastica del poeta si presenta solo come un ricordare, per così dire, riproduttivo: strano stato di cose per un poeta che a noi pare aver difeso e affermato come nessun altro il diritto all'at-tività produttiva della fantasia umana […] Quando Dante racconta una visione, ciò è per lui un ripetere; non domina in lui la libertà della poesia che nasce *hic et nunc* […]" Leo Spitzer, *Osservazi-oni sulla "Vita Nuova" – Il Paradiso terrestre*, ed. Marziano Guglielminetti and Eleonora Vincenti (Torino: Il Segnalibro, 1992), 54.

It is rather interesting that Spitzer uses the word *fantasy* only and not *imagination*, although these two lexemes have different structures of signification. The word *fantasy* appears in Dante's work only in Chapter XXIII (paragraph 14) and seems to have some "negative" overtone ("errare la mia fantasia", "erronea fantasia", and when Dante uses the word *imagination* as a synonym of that "mistaken" fantasy, imagination also gets a negative attribute: "vana imaginazione").[20] As if fantasy was a rather arbitrary, freely roaming activity with no limits, or rather with no *form* which could provide it with frames. But imagination appears as an active creative potential that generates the lyric poems, the narratives, and, ultimately the whole work of *Vita nuova*. We may recall Eliade's words emphasizing that the imaginative faculty grants the equilibrium between individual and collective psyches; "to have imagination is to enjoy a richness of interior life, an uninterrupted and spontaneous flow of images."[21] However, spontaneity does not mean arbitrary fantasies. The word *imagination* derives from *imago*, as Eliade points out, so our imagination endlessly *imitates, reproduces, reactivates and repeats* the "Images" as models. "To have imagination is to be able to see the world in its totality, for the power and the mission of the Images is to show all that remains refractory to the concept".[22]

To return to the second vision of our narrator protagonist in Chapter XII (paragraph 5), we can see (or read) Cupid's second visit when he engages in a conversation with Dante. This vision is also significant for understanding the linguistic processes of the text, since Cupid first starts to speak in Latin but Dante does not understand his sentence, and asks him in Italian ("»Che è ciò, segnore, che mi parli con tanta oscuritade?«"). Then Cupid answers him in "vulgar" Italian, too, which is pointed out even in the narration: "E quelli mi dicea in parole volgari…" Moreover, Cupid here calls upon Dante to write poems "in rhymes", i.e. in "vulgar" Italian and gives him advice, which may be considered as a little theory of poetry, since he recommends him the adequate use of the figure of *apostrophe* ("queste parole fa

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20 It is well-known that some theories of literature define "imaginary" as an authentic field of poetic activity. See for example: Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

21 Eliade, *Képek és jelképek*, 24. The English translation is cited from Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols. Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 20.

22 Eliade, *Képek és jelképek*, 24. The English translation is cited from Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 20.

che siano quasi un mezzo, sì che tu non parli a lei immediatamente, che non è degno; e non le mandare in parte, sanza me, ove potessero essere intese da lei…"). So this vision obviously marks the beginning of the conscious poetic activity of the narrator protagonist.[23]

Among the examples for the use of *vision*, *imagination*, *fantasia* and *image*, listed at the beginning of this chapter, passages from Chapter XL are still missing. This chapter discusses in detail the topics of *drawing* and *figures*, which may refer both to visual, drawn figures, and spoken or written ones, and finally the subject of *words*. It also seems to show the change of narration from images to words, a shift from the drawn, pictorial figures to the figures of speech and language, and consequently, to the creation of lyric poetry. ("…ritornaimi a la mia opera, cioè del *disegnare figure* d'angeli: e faccendo ciò, mi venne uno pensiero di *parole*, quasi per annovale, e *scrivere* a costoro li quali erano venuti a me; e dissi allora questo sonetto, lo quale comincia: *Era venuta*; lo quale ha due cominciamenti…"). As if it demonstrated the division of artistic activity into its "parts", the visual, pictorial and verbal parts. Consequently, it cannot be accidental that *the only lyric poem* (a sonnet) can be found *with two different beginnings* here. This double beginning seems to symbolize the reduplication of the imaginative artistic activity, which resembles the strict connection between *image* and *word* that Boehm illuminated with the help of etymology. He pointed out that in most Indo-European languages the verbs meaning 'to say, to tell' and 'to show' have a common root. This root is *dik* which corresponds to *dic* ('to show, let see') in Sanskrit, *daikumi* ('I show') in ancient Greek, *dico* ('I say') in Latin, and *gateikon* ('to show, sign, publish, utter') in Gothic.[24]

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23 The appearances of number 9, referring to Beatrice, create more connection between the two dreams of the Dante as the narrator protagonist. As for the importance of vulgar Italian, see one of the most recent publications: Paola Manni, "La legittimazione del volgare nella *Vita Nuova* e nel *Convivio*," in *La lingua di Dante* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2014), 31-36, esp. 31-32.

24 Boehm, "Bildbeschreibung. Über die Grenzen von Bild und Sprache," 35.

Spaces and Words, or the Spaces of the Poetic Word in *Vita Nuova*

Meditating on the role and potential functions of spaces in Dante's *Vita Nuova*, we can hardly avoid the famous *incipit*: "In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria dinanzi a la quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice: incipit vita nova. Sotto la quale rubrica io trovo scritte le parole le quali è mio intendimento d'assemplare in questo libello; e se non tutte, almeno la loro sentenzia."[25] These two initial sentences indicate and determine at once the "space" of the whole work when interpreting it in an explicit way not only as a fictive space, but rather as a *linguistic* ("le parole"), *literary-poetic* ("incipit vita nova" in which "new life" may be understood of course not only as a new beginning in the biography of Dante as the protagonist, but also as a turn and a new way in his literary activity) and *textual* space ("libro", "rubrica", "libello"). At first sight, this space appears to be a mental and linguistic one ("del libro della mia memoria"), since the activity of remembrance is always conditioned by language and it is able to work only with the help of the lingistic "production" of the speaker.[26] At the same time, this internal mental space may be also seen as a "time-space" or to recall Bakhtin's wording as a "chronotope",[27] since the function of memory is strictly linked to time and cannot work "independently" from or "outside" of it.

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25 Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, in *Tutte le opere di Dante. Edizione del Centenario* (Milano: U. Muria& C., 1965), 365.

26 The idea of a direct connection between memory and language is emphasized from the opposite side in the end of the *Divine Comedy* when Dante as the narrator meets with God, relates his experiences on his lost memory, comparing himself to a baby who can use his *tongue* (in Italian *lingua* that also means 'language') only to eat (or suck milk): "Omai sarà più corta mia favella, / Pur a quel ch'io ricordo, che d'un fante / Che bagni ancor la lingua alla mammella" (Par., XXXIII, 106-108) Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia. Volume III. Paradiso,* ed. Natalino Sapegno (Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1975), 422. In English blank verse it reads as "Ev'n as to what I do remember, mine / Will now be shorter than an infant's speech, / Who at the breast still bathes his tongue. […]" Par., XXXIII, 106-108 cited from Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri. The Italian Text with a Translation in English Blank Verse and a Commentary by Courtney Langdon, Vol. 3 Paradiso* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921).

27 М. М. Бахтин, [Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin], "Формы времени и хронотопа в романе. Очерки по исторической поэтике," in *Собрание сочинений. Т. 3. Теория романа (1930–1960 гг.)* ed. С.Г. Бочаров and В.В. Кожинов (Москва: Языки славянских культур, 2012), 340-503.

In the first sentence of the *Vita Nuova*, this temporary mental space is represented as something *to be read* ("a la quale poco si potrebbe leggere"). The concept of "textspace" evidentually demands the act of reading and not only from the narrator author, but also fom the reader. The concept of "reading" is reinforced by the word "*rubrica*" repeated twice. And the expressions "scritte le parole" and "in questo libello" emphasize the irrevocability of the basic concept of the work as a temporary, linguistic and composed textual space. From this point of view the fact that the first chapter of the work contains *only these two sentences*, may have a great significance. Moreover, comparing the length of this chapter to the last, Chapter XLII,[28] we can reveal an interesting parallelism: the last chapter, made of three sentences, is as short as the first one and not similarly at all to the all the other, much longer fifty chapters. This distribution may show us the intentional structure of the composition of the work, based on the rhetorical figure of reddition: it may reveal the two "cornerstones" of the "textspace" in *Vita Nuova*.[29]

It is known that Maria Corti's relevant insight clearly distinguishes between the words *libro* and *libello*, highlighting the act of renewal of the traditional dead metaphor of "the book of memory" and the creation of a new metaphorical space.[30] The potential meaning of these two words may also

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28   In this chapter we are referrig to the traditional 42 chapter division of Dante's work. It is not a philological decision as we would not refute Guglielmo Gorni's arguments, but rather a result of practical considerations and literary conventions. As for Gorni's idea on the division of the text, see: Guglielmo Gorni, "La *Vita Nova* nell'opera di Dante," in Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nova,* ed. Guglielmo Gorni, (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1996), IX-XLVIII.

29   However, Gorni does not consider Chapter I as an independent part of the composition; he emphasizes its introductory function ("proemio"). But we should add that the first (I) and the last (LVII) chapters or parts do have an important function in the *Vita Nuova* independently of the philological division from a thematic (they represent the so called "metatopic" of the book), a compositional (as an initial and a final part) and a functional (they explain the subject and the potential continuation of the work) point of view. As for Gorni's division and interpretation of Dante's work, see Gorni, "La *Vita Nova* nell'opera di Dante," I-LXII. On Gorni's view of Dante, see Antonio Lanza, "Il Dante di Guglielmo Gorni," in *Leggere dante oggi. Interpretare, commentare, tradurre alle soglie del settecentesimo anniversario. Atti del convegno Internazionale 24-26 Giugno 2010*, ed. Éva Vígh (Roma: Accademia d'Ungheria in Roma – Istituto Storico "Fraknói", 2011), 111-120.

30   "Le varianti dantesche al topos del libro della memoria segnano la capacità del poeta di rivitalizzare la tradizione con apporti stilistici originali […] In altre parole il libello non è trascritto da un'autentica memoria esistenziale, ma da una memoria che si innesta sulla immaginazione e sulla poetica dell'autore." Maria Corti, *Percorsi dell'invenzione. Il linguaggio poetico e Dante* (Torino: Einaudi, 1993), 40-41.

be reconsidered as a metaphorical process, a shift from the concept of an internal, mental "speaking space" to a metaphor of the *book* as a well-composed and written one.[31]

Consequently, the whole text of the *Vita Nuova*, following the first chapter or the first two statements may be interpreted as a fictive story written in an imaginary temporary and linguistic textual space in which we cannot distinguish between "real" and "fictive" spaces, more precisely primarily and secondarily fictive spaces. It is a question of literary theory whether or not we can make a difference between the so called "real" and "fictive" spaces in a literary text. But even the language philosophy developed by the American scholar I. A. Richards raises the same question when he stresses that our perception of the world is absolutely metaphorical, because it is only a result of the projection of our consciousness.[32]

The "primarily" fictive space in the *Vita Nuova* may referentially be identified with the city of Florence, as the commentaries based on Dantean philology usually and logically explain. Florence constitutes the place where almost the whole plot of the work develops. But we should recall Lotman's 1968 article on the problem of the artistic space in Russian literature[33] in which he argues that the *sujet* of a narrative literary work is generally developed within the confines of a determined local *continuum*. Naive readers try to identify (for instance geographically) the episodes with the real local relations. Nevertheless, the special artistic space cannot be completely traced back to the simple remembrance of a local specificity in an

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31 The term *metaphorical process* was introduced by I. A. Richards and also used by Ricœur. See: Ivor Armstrong Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric (1938)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950); Paul Ricœur, *Bibliai hermeneutika*, trans. Marcell Mártonffy, ed. Tibor Fabiny (Budapest: Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hermeneutikai Kutatóközpont, 1995), esp. 91-96. In his *La métaphore vive* Ricœur also studies the concept of "metaphorical truth": Paul Ricœur, "Vers le concept de verité métaphorique," in *La métaphore vive* (Paris: Seuil, Paris, 1975), esp. 310-325.

32 "Our world is a projected world, shot through with characters lent to it from our own life." "The processes of metaphor in language, the exchanges between the meanings of words which we study in explicit verbal metaphors, are super-imposed upon a perceived world which is itself a product of earlier or unwitting metaphor, and we shall not deal with them justly if we forget that this is so." Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric,* 108-109.

33 Jurij Lotman, "A művészi tér problémája Gogol prózájában," in *Kultúra, szöveg, narráció. Orosz elméletírók tanulmányai. In Honorem Jurij Lotman*, ed. Kovács Árpád and V. Gilbert Edit (Pécs: Janus Pannonius Egyetemi Kiadó, 1994), 119-185, esp. 117, 129.

existing region or area. So we have to declare that the artistic space is not a simple model of a "natural" space, but a continuum in which the characters take their places and where the plot develops.

Bearing these theoretical ideas in mind, we should study those passages in the *Vita Nuova* where something changes in the relation of spatial connections. The first (and seemingly small) change of the fictive cityspace happens in chapter VII which informs the reader about the removal or perhaps death[34] of the first screen lady ("donna dello schermo"), and the birth of a sonnet written by the Dante as the narrator protagonist. In chapter IX, the reader learns about the death of the first screen lady ("Appresso la morte di questa donna…"), and the narrator protagonist leaves the city. On his journey, he has a vision in which Cupid (Amor) recommends him to have a new lady to hide his love for Beatrice,[35] and after the description of this vision the narrator shares another famous sonnet ("Cavalcando l'altr'ier per un cammino…") with the reader. Thus that the function of the protagonist's movements in the fictive space are clearly connected with the "screen ladies" ("donne-schermo"), and, more generally, with the metaphorical motif of reduplication recurring in various forms and several times in the text. Chapter XIX provides an especially relevant example when the spatial transgression of the narrator protagonist remains almoust hidden: "Avenne poi che passando per uno cammino lungo lo quale sen gia uno rivo chiaro molto…" When the reader realises that it is the narrator protagonist's movement from the centre of the "city", the text mentions it as an insignificant event and does not give any explanation for it ("…onde poi, *ritornato* a la sopraddetto cittade, pensando alquanti die, cominciai una canzone…").[36] This "episode" correlates with the earlier "border transgressions", because

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34 "La donna co la quale io avea tanto tempo celata la mia volontade, convenne che si partisse de la sopradetta cittade e andasse in paese molto lontano". Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 369.

35 "E però lo dolcissimo segnore, lo quale mi segnoreggiava per la vertù de la gentilissima donna, ne la mia imaginazione apparve come peregrino leggeramente vestito ed i vili drappi. […] A me parve che Amore mi chiamasse, e dicessemi queste parole: «Io vegno da quella donna la quale è stata tua lunga difesa, e so che lo suo rivenire non sarà a gran tempi; e però quello cuore che io ti facea avere a lei, io l'ho meco, e portolo a donna la quale sarà tua difension, come questa era». E nominallomi per nome, sì che io la conobbi bene. «Ma tuttavia, di queste parole ch'io t'ho ragionate se alcuna cosa ne dicessi, dille nel modo che per loro non si discernesse lo stimulato amore che tu hai mostrato e che ti converrà mostrare ad altri. »" Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 372.

36 Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 384.

it explicates the topic of "more ladies", and also the multiplicity of this top-
ic since the narrator introduces his new poem with the following words:
"e pensai che parlare di lei non si convenia che io facesse, se io non parlasse
a donne in seconda persona, e non ad ogni donna, ma solamente a coloro
che sono gentili e che non sono pure femmine."[37]

This passage moves beyond and consequently reinterprets the earlier
border transgressions of the protagonist, which makes it evident that the
topic of "hidden love" represented by the screen ladies ("donne–schermo")
is also *the metapoetical topic of artistic language*. This claim may also be
supported with the often cited sentence embedded between two statements
in the small prosaic introduction of chapter XIX: "la mia lingua parlò
quasi come per sé stessa mossa, e disse…"[38] It cannot be accidental that
the narrator protagonist here returns to the initial metaphor of the book,
saying: "*Queste parole io ripuosi ne la mente* con grande letizia, pensando di
prenderle *per mio cominciamento*…"[39]

Now we are arriving at or returning to the subject of language. From
this point of view, it is worth paying attention to the word "*cominciamento*"
and to its potential significance because of its connection with the *spatial
theme of the city*. The city has been mentioned many times before usually
as a place and origin of special customs, but in the end of Dante's work,
it will gain an allegoric character with the double citation of Jeremiah's
sentence from the Bible ("Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo!") in
chapters XXVIII and XXX.[40] These passages evidently demand a historical
interpretation of the political power of Florence in the beginning of the
14th century. Nevertheless, what we find interesting is the *poetic connection*
between Beatrice's (un)narrated death and the allegorical interpretation of
the city, and the statement of the "new material" in chapter XXX, which
highlights the importance of the poetic act of repetition: "*Quomodo sedet
sola civitas*. E questo dico, acció che altri non si maravigli perché io l'abbia
allegato di sopra, quasi come entrata de la nuova materia che appresso

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37   Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 383.
38   Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 383.
39   Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 383-384.
40   Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 401-403.

vene."[41] The "new material" may be easily seen and interpreted as a new poetic "turn" in Dante and a reference to his next and greatest literary work, the *Divine Comedy*.

Otherwise the last chapter of the *Vita Nuova* and even the whole work are *preparations* in genre for the *Divine Comedy*, which claims to unify lyrical poetry written in verse, commentaries and narratives, the last two of which find their adequate form in prosaic language. So the *Vita Nuova* is composed of three different types of texts: (1) lyrical pieces written in verse by the author significantly earlier, as he claims; (2) their division and explanation in prose by the narrator author; and (3) a fictive narrated series of events, the "love story" with Beatrice in prose, which provides the narrator with more possibilities to explain and interpret some events of the plot and even some declarations of the characters. A composition like this may be considered, both from a historical and a "modern" point of view, as a brand new type of textual arrangement, which renews the form of the medieval genre of *prosimetrium*, but, at the same time, creates a new poetic ground and the possibility for a potential synthesis of verse and prose, lyrics and narratives.

The literary and poetic innovation of the *Vita Nuova* is the brilliant and light union of these different kinds of text forms, or the creation of a new *narrative* form and genre, which will become in its developed form the *novel*. On the other hand, the combination of different text types shows some kind of similarity to the phenomenon Yury Lotman called "text within a text"[42] that is intentionally not called "intertextuality" here. In his article on this topic, Lotman states that texts are not the unique manifestations of a single language; to create a text we need at least *two* languages. There is no text of this type that may be adequately described from the perspective of a single language.[43] We do not need to explain the significance of the problem of "two languages" in Dante's *Vita Nuova*: it is enough to think, for instance, of chapter XII, in which the narrator protagonist finds the Latin

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41   Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 402.
42   Jurij Lotman, "Szöveg a szövegben," in *Kultúra, szöveg, narráció. Orosz elméletírók tanulmányai. In Honorem Jurij Lotman*, ed. Kovács Árpád and V. Gilbert Edit (Pécs: Janus Pannonius Egyetemi Kiadó, 1994), 57-81, esp. 63.
43   Lotman, "Szöveg a szövegben," 68.

words of Cupid (Amor) rather obscure who thus decides to speak in Italian instead. Nevertheless, we must add that his Italian words do not solve the misunderstanding between him and the narrator protagonist. But we can also consider the famous argument in chapter XXV about the first use of vulgar Italian in lyric poems written on the topic of love.[44]

Discussing the problem of the text within the text in a study written in 1981 in Russian, Lotman focuses on texts in which the problem of a great variety of codes is located within the boundaries of the text, and the division of the Text in more texts becomes an internal principle of text production. These internal layers of the text are mutually untranslatable, so as Lotman continues, the text reveals its *conflictual* nature.[45] I guess that this description adequately explains the linguistic and textual complexity of the *Vita Nuova*.

Thus the necessity of *movement* or *change* is hidden in Dante's text. Another Russian scholar, Osip Mandelstam, emphasizes the function of *motion* in the *Divine Comedy* explicitly connecting it with the artistic form, i.e. with the form of texts in verse. As he explains,

> both the *Inferno* and, in particular, the *Purgatorio* glorify the human gait, the measure and rhythm of walking, the footstep and its shape. The step, linked with breathing and saturated with thought, Dante understood as the beginning of prosody. To indicate walking he utilizes a multitude of varied and charming turns of phrase.
>
> In Dante philosophy and poetry are constantly on the go, perpetually on their feet. Even a stop is but a variety of accumulated movement; a platform for conversations is created by Alpine conditions. The metrical foot is the inhalation and the exhalation of the step. Each step draws a conclusion, invigorates, syllogizes.[46]

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44 "[…] anticamente non erano dicitori d'amore in lingua volgare, anzi rano dicitori d'amore certi poete in lingua latina […] E non è molto numero d'anni passati, che appariro prima questi poete volgari; ché dire per rima in volgare tanto èquanto dire per versi in latino, secondo alcuna proporzione. […] E lo primo che cominciò a dire sì come poeta volgare, si mosse però che che volle fare intendere le sue parole a donna, a la quale era malagevole d'intendere li versi latini. E questo è contra coloro che rimano sopra altra matera che amorosa, con ciò sia cosa che cotale modo di parlare fosse dal principio trovato per dire d'amore." Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 397.

45 Lotman, "Szöveg a szövegben," 57-81. esp. 69-70.

46 The English text is cited from Jane Gary Harris and Constance Link's translation. See Osip Mandelstam, "Conversation about Dante*,*" in *The Poet's Dante* ed. Peter S. Hawkins and Rachel Jacoff (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 40-93.

In our view, this insight also characterizes quite well the *Vita Nuova* for two reasons. The first is the complex form of the work compiling prosaic and verse based texts in a composition where the prosaic texts, which also have the double character of a text-analyzing and a narrative-creating one, function to explain the lyric poems in various ways. The second reason is that the topic of *moving* and steps is also articulated in this work of Dante. We may remember the already mentioned transgressions of the protagonist, especially the first time when he leaves the city on a horse, and gives a poem to the reader ("Cavalcando l'altr'ier per un cammino"). In line with Mandelstam's conclusions, we are inclined to interpret the act of horse-riding not only in a thematic way, as an obvious symbol of the possibility of some sexual intercourse (as we know, this passage addresses the problem of the screen ladies), but also as an autopoetic metaphor of the rhythm of lyric poetry. Moreover, the chapter XIV discusses the topic of *foot* and *step* in an *ontological* context, similarly to the beginning of the *Divine Comedy*: "dissi a questo mio amico queste parole: »Io tenni li piedi in quella parte de la vita di là da la quale non si puote ire più per intendimento di ritornare«."[47]

If the movement of "step" is seen as a metaphor of text form or the text organisation, we have to involve into our interpretation even the concepts of *body* and *articulation*. As for the first, the body of the narrator protagonist many times becomes the topic of the narration and partly also of the lyric passages, and not exclusively in a Platonic sense. The most important part we find in chapter XXV, which stands as a clearly autopoetic and metalinguistic centre of the *Vita Nuova*. Here the narrator contemplates the possible interpretations of Cupid (Amor):

> Potrebbe qui dubitare persona degna da dichiararle onne dubitazione, e dubitare potrebbe di ciò, che io dico d'Amore come se fosse una cosa per sé, e non solamente sustanzia intelligente, ma sì come fosse sustanzia corporale, la quale cosa, secondo la veritade, é falsa; ché Amore non é per sé sí come sustanzia, ma é uno accidente in sustanzia. E che io dica di lui come se fosse corpo, ancora sí come se fosse uomo, appare per tre cose che dico di lui. Dico che lo vidi venire, onde, con ció sia cosa che venire dica moto locale, e localmente mobile per sé, secondo lo Filosofo, sia solamente corpo, appare che io ponga Amore essere corpo.[48]

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47   Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 379.
48   Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 396-397.

In this passage, the *body*, Cupid (*Amor)*, the *vulgar language*, the *vulgar poetry in rhymes* become metaphors of each others and reveal a self-reflecting quality of text formation and the utmost importance of poetic articulation. In the next chapter (Chapter XXVI), the well-known poem ("*Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare…*") quasi shows us the process of the articulation from the mute state ("ch'ogne lingua deven tremando muta") to the motion of the mouth ("e par che de la sua labbia si mova / un spirito soave pien d'amore, / che va dicendo a l'anima: Sospira.")[49] As Mandelstam claims in his study on Dante, while "the mouth works, the smile nudges the line of verse, cleverly and gaily the lips redden, the tongue trustingly presses itself against the palate."[50] Or we may remember Bakhtin, who in his 1924 study on the problem of the material, content and form emphasized that literary form has the power to activate even its readers: while reading a text, we appropriate its rhythm, intonation and the representing activity of metaphor, and we also articulate its tension and the internal gestures of narration which create motion etc. So we as readers are activated by the form.[51]

Returning to the question of space, we recall Yuri Lotman again, who in his book *Culture and Explosion*, published in Russian in 1992, says that the space created by an artistic text elevates its author and recipient into the situation of freedom, and makes the act of cognition possible for them.[52] The mentioned fictiveness of the arts and artistic language is characterized by him with the English word *if*. *If* is the sign of the language of literature that introduces the infinity of possible variants into our life.[53] We need it because, as he states, the real essence of man is not able to come to light in reality. The arts take man into the world of freedom, and thus expand his possibilities to act.[54] This hermeneutic thought reminds us of the Heideggerian argumentation on the essence, the "truth" of the *thing* which cannot be disclosed in life, not even in various philosophical attempts to define it,

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49   Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 399.
50   Mandelstam, "Conversation about Dante*,*" 42.
51   M. M. Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art" trans. Kenneth Brostrom, in *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas, 1990), 257-325, esp. 294.
52   Jurij Lotman, *Kultúra és robbanás*, trans. Szűcs Teri (Budapest: Pannonica, 2001), 210.
53   Lotman, *Kultúra és robbanás*, 212.
54   Lotman, *Kultúra és robbanás*, 211.

only in the arts (his famous example is Van Gogh's painting entitled and representing clogs).[55] So in this sense *exclusively* a work of art can create a free and endless space in its artistic (pictural, architectonical, music, cinematographic) or verbal *language*, in a space where the unhidden essence of subjects (persons and things) can manifest itself.

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55   Martin Heidegger, *A műalkotás eredete*, trans. Bacsó Béla (Budapest: Európa, 1988), esp. 56-62, 88-89.

The Power of Narration.
Questions of Genre in Boccaccio's *Decameron*

Boris Eichenbaum's pioneering study in the field of description and defini-
tion of the short story (in other terms, the novell written with double *l* or the
novella) written in 1919 on Gogol (*The Structure of Gogol's The Overcoat*)
divides short stories into two groups: one in which the "the author's personal
tone" functions as an organizing principle, giving "the illusion of a narrative";
and another one, where the narrating voice is "a formal tying together of
events, and thus occupies an auxiliary position" in story-telling. [56]
He argues that

> the primitive short story and the novel of adventure have nothing
> to do with the first-person narrative, nor do they need it because
> their whole interest and their whole movement are determined
> by a rapid and diverse succession of events and situations. The
> interlacement of motifs and their motivation – such is the organic
> principle of a primitive short story.[57]

And it is such effective in the comical short story, too, which is usually
based on an anecdote, and rich in comical situations.

There is no doubt that the novellas of the *Decameron* from the point of
view of the theory of genre belong to the second (but chronologically the
first) group of short stories. (The phrase "primitive novella" in Eichenbaum
does not mean an aesthetic value, neither a degradation from the part of
the theorist, but it should be considered a typological insight, reflecting
also the history of the genre). It seems to be evident that Boccaccio's stories
are mostly based on an anecdote (it is enough to mention the topic of the

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56 Эйхенбаум Б. М., "Как сделана «Щинель» Гоголя," in *Сквозь литературу* (Ленинград: Academ-
    ia, 1924), 149-165. The English translation is cited from Boris Eichenbaum, "The Structure of Gogol's
    The Overcoat", trans. Beth Paul and Muriel Nesbitt, *Russian Review* 22, no. 4. (1963): 377-399.
57 Eichenbaum, "The Structure of Gogol's *The Overcoat*", 377.

second, the third, the fifth, the sixth, the seventh, the eights and the tenth day),[58] and a lot of them corresponds to the "classification" of the comical novel (let us only think about the numerous erotic stories in the collection).

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58 "Endeth here the first day of the Decameron; beginneth the second, in which, under the rule of Filomena, they discourse of the fortunes of such as after divers misadventures have at last attained a goal of unexpected felicity." The English text of the *Decameron* is cited from Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Decameron*, translated by J. M. Rigg. *Decameron Web*. Last modified February 15, 2010. https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/DecIndex.php?lang=eng ("Finisce la prima giornata del DECAMERON: incomincia la seconda, nella quale, sotto il reggimento di Filomena, si ragiona di chi, da diverse cose infestato, sia oltre alla sua speranza riuscito a lieto fine." Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, *Introduzione di Umberto Bosco, Note e glossario di Domenico Consoli* (Milano: Bietti, 1972), 65.
"Endeth here the second day of the Decameron, beginneth the third, in which, under the rule of Neifile, discourse is had of the fortune of such as have painfully acquired some much-coveted thing, or, having lost, have recovered it." ("…incomincia la terza, nella quale si ragiona, sotto il reggimento di Neifile, di chi alcuna cosa molto da lui disiderata con industria acquitasse o la perduta ricoverasse," Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 143).
"Endeth here the third day of the Decameron, beginneth the fourth, in which, under the rule of Filostrato, discourse is had of those whose loves had a disastrous close. Endeth here the fourth day of the Decameron, beginneth the fifth, in which under the rule of Fiammetta discourse is had of good fortune befalling lovers after divers direful or disastrous adventures." ("…incominia la quarta, nella quale, sotto il reggimento di Filostrato, si ragiona di coloro li cui amori ebbero infelice fine," Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 206).
"Endeth here the fifth day of the Decameron, beginneth the sixth, wherein, under the rule of Elisa, discourse is had of such as by some sprightly sally have repulsed an attack, or by some ready retort or device have avoided loss, peril or scorn." ("…incomincia la quinta, nella quale, sotto il reggimento di Fiammetta, si ragiona di ciò che ad alcuno amante, dopo alcuni fieri o sventurati accidenti, felicemente avvenisse", Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 261).
"Endeth here the sixth day of the Decameron, beginneth the seventh, in which, under the rule of Dioneo, discourse is had of the tricks which, either for love or for their deliverance from peril, ladies have heretofore played their husbands, and whether they were by the said husbands detected, or no." ("…incomincia la sesta, nella quale, sotto il reggimento d'Elissa, si ragiona di chi non alcuno leggiadro motto, tentato, si riscosse, o con pronta risposta o avvedimento fuggì perdita o percolo o scorno", Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 311).
"Endeth here the seventh day of the Decameron, beginneth the eighth, in which, under the rule of Lauretta, discourse is had of those tricks that, daily, woman plays man, or man woman, or one man another." ("…incomincia la settima, nella quale, sotto il reggimento di Dioneo, si ragiona delle beffe, le quali, o per amore o per salvamento di loro, le donne hanno già fatte a' lor mariti, senza essersene avveduti o no", Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 339).
"Endeth here the ninth day of the Decameron, and beginneth the tenth, in which, under the rule of Pamfilo, discourse is had of such as in matters of love, or otherwise, have done something with liberality or magnificence." ("…incomincia la decima e ultima, nella quale, sotto il reggimento di Panfilo, si ragiona di chi liberamente ovvero magnificamente alcuna cosa operasse intorno a' fatti d'amore o d'altra cosa", Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 484).

And indeed, examining the single stories separately, one can conclude that it is the narrated topic or subject that determines narration and textual organisation. The individual voices (puns, articulating and mimicking gestures, linguistic paradoxes) of the narrators do not influence the organisation of the single novellas, although we can read stories from *ten different narrators* in every day of the fictive situation of story-telling. As for the narrator author who represents the ten later narrators as the heroes in the "frame-story" of the first day, in spite of his touching depiction of the circumstances of the plague, his way of speaking, his discursive methods are not different at all from the ten narrators' style and linguistic manners (a good example for it is the expression "Gracious Ladies" in the introduction of the first day which will often be repeated in the beginnings of the various stories of the *Decameron* by various story-tellers.)

Consequently, Boccaccio's stories could rightly make a foundation for the later definitions of the genre of the short story or novella. In accordance with such definitions, the short story is based "on elaboration of a limited situation or idea"[59] and concentrated on the narration of one central (or permanently repeated) event which includes the essence, the *totality* of the whole life of the hero.[60] While in the novel one can usually find a structure characterized by more elements, episodes and plotlines, in the *novella* there are more episodes, but only one line of the plot. The topic of the novel is the totality of a human life (Lukács, Broch), while the subject of the short story is rather an isolated event (Lukács) or the totality of a situation (Broch).[61] There are significant differences also in the artistic methods of the two genres. The novel prefers extension and elaboration, while the story-telling in the novella deals with the methods of condensation and reduction, and only afterwards, within these frames recourses to the method of elaboration.

That is why the critical reception of the *Decameron* is fond of the thematic analysis of the single stories,[62] likes to reveal the literary and cultural antecedents of these subjects and their further literary inheritance,[63]

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59   Beáta Thomka quotes Judith Leibowitz. Beáta Thomka, *A pillanat formái* (Újvidék: Forum, 1986), 27.
60   See the formalist Petrovsky's theory of novella. М. А. Петровский [M. A. Petrovsky], "Морфология новеллы" in *Ars poetica. Сборник статьей,* ed. М. А. Петровского (Москва, 1927), 69-100.
61   Thomka, *A pillanat formái,* 14.
62   See for example Carlo Salinari, "Introduzione al *Decameron,*" in *Boccaccio, Manzoni, Pirandello* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1979), 55-70.
63   For instance: *Boccaccio etal.on, fiatal kutatók konferenciája*, ed. Dobozy Nóra Emőke, Lovas Borbála, Szilágyi Emőke Rita (Budapest: ELTE BTK, 2009).

or prefers to approach the whole volume from a social or an ideological point of view (see for instance the recurrent analysis of the geographic locations, and the situation and characters of the female heroes in the work).[64] Since it is exactly the topic of the volume that may demonstrate the determined step from the medieval view of world towards the colourful Renaissance way of thinking, from theological topics to secular ones, from Latin towards vulgar Italian, which step was made by Boccaccio following the example of Dante and Petrarch, and completing their work in these fields.

Nevertheless, from the aspect of genre-theory, we find a double problem here. Boccaccio's work has undoubtedly renewed the genre of the *novella*, as it is suggested by the etymology of the word *novella* which means 'novelty'. (We can remark that this "novelty" is metaphorically reflected in the introduction in which the ten heroes – later narrators – meet in the church called Santa Maria *Novella*. Thus the name of the scene becomes, using the Bakhtinian term, a "represented word" in the text, and a metaphorical starting-point for all the next hundred novellas.) That is why literary theory considers Boccaccio's stories the main examples of the genre.[65]

On the other hand, we cannot leave out of consideration that we are talking about a *cycle of novellas*, which means a close inter-dependence of the stories. Nevertheless, one cannot stabilize in a convincing manner a thematic inter-connection between the hundred stories of *Decameron* (it is enough to think about the permitted freedom of the choice of topics on the first and the ninth days);[66] the thematic view of the interpretation in this regard promises poor results.

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64 See Giorgio Padoan, "Sulla genesi e la pubblicazione del *Decameron*," in *Il Boccaccio. Le Muse, il Parnaso e l'Arno*, (Olschki: Firenze, 1978), 93-121; Mario Marti, "Il *Decameron*" in Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Mario Marti, (Rizzoli BUR: Milano, 2010) XVII; Antonio Donato Sciacovelli, *Per una tipologia "nuova" delle figure femminili del* Decameron (Savaria/Szombathely/): Ambra, 2005).

65 In Hungarian secondary schools the criteria of the novella-genre are taught by the analysis of the so called "falcon-story", the ninth story of the Fifth day, the story of Federigo degli Alberighi.

66 "Beginneth here the first day of the Decameron, in which, when the author has set forth, how it came to pass that the persons, who appear hereafter, met together for interchange of discourse, they, under the rule of Pampinea, discourse of such matters as most commend themselves to each in turn." ("Comincia la prima gironata del DECAMERON, nella quale, dopo la dimostrazione fatta dall'autore, per che cagione avvenisse di doversi quelle persone, che appresso si mostrano, ragunare a ragionare insieme, sotto il reggimento di Pampinea si ragiona di quello che più aggrada a chiascheduno", Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 20).

"Beginneth here the first day of the Decameron, in which, when the author has set forth, how it came to pass that the persons, who appear hereafter, met together for interchange of discourse,

The succession of stories connected to a frame-situation cannot be considered Boccaccio's invention: the *Decameron* forms a part of the genre-series which can show such literary "achievements" like the Persian *Thousand and One Day* or the *Arabian Nights* (otherwise the *Thousand and One Nights*). That continuity is many times remarked in Boccaccio's text: the detailed and pathetic description of the land and the palace (as Paradise!) where the company of the ten young men (the narrators) found a provisional residence reminds us of the representation of the palaces in the *Thousand and One Night*, likewise the description of the other palace and garden in the quite long introduction of the narrator author to the stories on the third day. Moreover, the narrative representation of the first common repast or the ritual walking and wreath-making after the daily story-telling process have common features with the narrative style of the *Arabian Nights'* similar passages. Despite these narrative and motivic resemblances, the cycle-composition in Boccaccio oversteps the slack unifying fact of the narrative situation, and the narrative expressions recall the literary tradition, and after all create the base of a completely new genre. The example to be followed for Boccaccio could have been the *New Life* (*Vita Nuova*) and the *Divine Commedy* (*Divina Commedia*) of Dante, especially the former work, in which the author had composed an integral, but fictive love and life story, supplementing his own lyrical poems written several years before, on the one hand, with their compositional analysis (the so called *prosimetrium*) made in a prosaic form, and, on the other hand, with some fictive narrative events of the developing love between Dante as the protagonist and Beatrice, so with the description of the alleged circumstances of the formation of the poems (again written in prose). Boccaccio's book shows obvious parallels with Dante's earlier work, since every day of the *Decameron* ends with a song, a poem sung by one or more members of the company, so Boccaccio interweaves the narrative and prosaic stories with lyrical poems to a certain extent similarly to the compositional methods of the *New Life*. Such a similarity of the hybridity of forms and genres becomes even stronger on the tenth day of the Decameron when the sixth

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they, under the rule of Pampinea, discourse of such matters as most commend themselves to each in turn. ("…incomincia la nona, nella quale, sotto il reggimento d'Emilia, si ragiona ciascuno secondo che gli piace e di quello che più gli aggrada", Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 449).

and seventh novellas also contain a song, a song of Cupid (Amor), com-
posed in that vocative and dialogical form that can be attributed properly to
Dante's poems. And it is nearly unnecessary to mention Dante and Petrarch
as the representatives of the operation of the love-subject as a text and genre
forming force.[67]

In brief, Boccaccio with his cycle of short stories takes a step towards
a literary *epic* work of a considerable size (retrospectively, from a mod-
ern point of view, towards the *novel*), like Dante has done. Boccaccio's in-
clination towards Dante's art is clearly manifested on the first page of the
First day of the *Decameron*: Boccaccio starts his work with a reflection on
his own book ("I acknowledge that this present worke of mine, will / in
your judgement / appear to have a harsh and offensive beginning, in re-
gard of the mournfull remembrance it beareth at the verie entrance of the
last pestilentiall mortality…"),[68] like Dante did it in the *New Life*, and the
book appears in both cases as the vehicle of memory and an autopoetic
sign.[69] Moreover, Boccaccio illustrates the teething troubles of the lecture,
so the painful memory of the plague epidemic, applying *the metaphor of the
mountain-side,* very similarly to the first verses of the *Divine Comedy*. After
all, the mountain may be interpreted in both texts as a trope of the possibil-
ity of the insight from above, of a potential or future comprehension of all
the events and the whole story of the two literary works.[70]

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67 See for example Francesco Bruni, *Boccaccio. L'invenzione della letteratura mezzana* (Bologna: Il
    Mulino, 1990), 241-248, 429-448, 465-477.
68 "Tante conosco che la presente opera al vostro iudicio avrà grave e noioso principio, sì come è la
    dolorosa ricorda zione della pestifera mortalità trapassata…" Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 20.
69 "This horrid beginning will be to you even such as to wayfarers is *a steep and rugged mountain*,
    beyond which stretches a plain most fair and delectable, which the toil of the ascent and descent
    does but serve to render more agreeable to them; for, as the last degree of joy brings with it sorrow,
    so misery has ever its sequel of happiness." ("Questo orrido cominciamento vi fia non altramenti
    che *a' camminanti una montagna aspra ed erta*, appresso alla quale un bellissimo piano e dilettevole
    sia riposto, il quale tanto più viene loro piacevole quanto maggiore è stata del salire e dello smon-
    tare la gravezza." Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 20 (emphasis added).
70 "But after I had reached a mountain's foot, / At that point where the valley terminated, / Which had
    with consternation pierced my heart, / Upward I looked, and I beheld its shoulders, /Vested already
    with that planet's rays / Which leadeth others right by every road. / Then was the fear a little quieted
    / That in my heart's lake had endured throughout / The night, which I had passed so piteously. /
    And even as he, who, with distressful breath, / Forth issued from the sea upon the shore, / Turns
    to the water perilous and gazes; / So did my soul, that still was fleeing onward, / Turn itself back
    to re-behold the pass / Which never yet a living person left. / After my weary body I had rested,/

The epidemic in Boccaccio represents the violence of the systematic process of life, the "lost path" "in the journey of our life" (Dante), or with the words of a later author, the time "out-of-joint" (Shakespeare), so it functions as an event of recognising the lost possibility to continue the earlier way of living and way of thinking (similarly to Dante's wood). The starting point of the *Divine Comedy* and the *Decameron* is signed by the disintegration and dissolution of the order of life: both "story series" begin in the chronotopical time and space of *chaos*, but this confusion at the same time manifests the token and the necessary precondition of the generation of a new order and a new life. That is why love becomes an inevitable topic in Boccaccio's work, involving its every corporal manifestation, for being able to represent and symbolize the fertility, productivity, and rebirth of life. The close connection between the thought of "the end of the world" (death, plague, chaos etc.) and love will give inspiration to more pieces of world literature: it is probably enough to mention one of Pushkin's *Little Tragedies, The Feast in Time of Plague* (or *Feast During the Plague*) and its original, the John Wilson's *City of the Plague*; or *The Betrothed*, the novel of the Italian Romantic writer Alessandro Manzoni, where the whole story of the engaged couple develops in the period and starts because of the epidemic of plague in Northern Italy in the fourteenth century; or two texts of the Columbian Gabriel García Márquez, the *Love in the Time of Cholera* and the *Clandestin in Chile*. The enumeration could be carried on, and certainly cannot be completed, although we may point to the phenomenon or to the probable fact that the literary texts having "chosen" the topic of a common disaster, for example an epidemic, and connected it with the subject of love, often have a *hybrid character of genre*, too. (Let us remember that the genre of the "little tragedy" is only Pushkin's invention, the Manzonian work is a romantic historic novel, but it is based on a fictive manuscript (now

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The way resumed I on the desert slope, / So that the firm foot ever was the lower." "Ma poi ch'i' fui al piè d'un colle giunto, / là dove terminava quella valle / che m'avea di paura il cor compunto, guardai in alto e vidi le sue spalle / vestite già de' raggi del pianeta / che mena dritto altrui per ogne calle. / Allor fu la paura un poco queta, / che nel lago del cor m'era durata / la notte ch'i' passai con tanta pieta. / E come quei che con lena affannata, / uscito fuor del pelago a la riva, / si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata, / così l'animo mio, ch'ancor fuggiva, / si volse a retro a rimirar lo passo / che non lasciò già mai persona viva. / Poi ch'èi posato un poco il corpo lasso, / ripresi via per la piaggia diserta, / sì che 'l piè fermo sempre era 'l più basso."

we could say, in a really postmodern way), while the *Clandestin in Chile* is treated by literary history and theory of genre as a documentary novel rather than a reportage.) In this aspect the "co-existence" of the topics of a seemingly total death and the renewing love in a literary work – as the narrator of the *Clandestin* states, "love flourishes in the time of plague" – seems to involve some kind of deconstruction of the genres previously existed and to create new ones, which frames, conditions or "rules" had not been clear in the time of their generation yet, but these "genre-hybrids" gave a new and in some periods quite regular and systematic example for the next generation of literary works.

Boccaccio's narrative situation created in the *Introduction* and the view of life of his stories can be approached by the concepts of *carnival* and *grotesque realism*, used by Bakhtin primarily for the characterization of Rabelais's art. As Bakhtin argues, human laughter as organizing power of all forms of the grotesque realism has been connected to the lower, material and corporal regions. The demotion, the reduction of the sublime is never formal in the grotesque realism. The meanings of "above" and "below", "up" and "down" have an absolute and strictly *topographic* nature. "Up" is always the sky, "down" is the earth, while the earth is a "swallowing up", a devouring principle, and at the same time also represents the birth and the new life (as mother-lap). From a closer corporal aspect, which never differs completely from the cosmic aspect, the "above" means the face (the head) and the "below" signs the genitals, the stomach and the bottom. Descending in the grotesque realism is a direct contact with the earth. What is destruction, on the one hand, also prepares the birth of a new, a better life on the other hand. The same process of decent appears in the moments of the connection with the life of the lower parts of the body, with sexual intercourse, conception, pregnancy, birth, devouring or evacuation of bowels and bladder. These kinds of decent deepen the grave of the body for a new life.[71] And if we remember the fifth novella of the second day, the famous story of Andreuccio da Perugia, who has to get in touch three times with

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71   М. М. Бахтин [Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin], "Творчество Франсуа Рабле и народная культура средневековья и Ренессанса (1965)," in *Собрание сочинений, Т. 4 (2),* Институт мировой литературы им. (Москва: А. М. Горького Российской академии наукб, 2010), 7-517, esp. 28-33.

the lower "world" (first with stools, then he has to descend into a well, finally he is forced to climb in a grave), but in the end he returns home with success and quite rich, we shall see the validity of Bakhtin's words.

The plot of each story told in Boccaccio's volume representing this inverse, grotesque world, in spite of mischievousness of the subjects and tone, in every case communicates to the reader a certain fatality (see the plague, the insuperable love-desire or rapacity etc.) and after all the experience of the *impossibility of decision*. The plot structure of the stories is always regulated by *the same kind of act,* by *the principle of the same solution* of seemingly different problems. It can be well shown in adventure stories with a picaresque structure, the best example for which is provided by Alatiel's story where the girl after a series of love adventures returns to her father in an apparently "untouched" or virgin state and gets married,[72] or in the novellas constructed on two protagonists who are brought into contrast to each other, but where the first person hits back to the second completing *precisely the same act* as the other did with him before: see for instance the stories about Zeppa and Spinellocio (the eighth novella of the eighth day), the student Rinieri and the young widow (the seventh novella of the eighth day) or Salabeotto and the Sicilian girl (the tenth story of the eighth day).

The plot based on the repetition of the same act, on the impossibility of a choice, is proper to the genre of the novella, as the Russian theorist, Smirnov says.[73] The novella destroys the variations of the act: in its world the choice does not work, since the execution of the same act cannot result in the change or renewal of the original situation. It reveals the special history-concept of the genre of the novella, where the story is not a testimony of obtaining a new state of the world, but the inaccessibility of it. The novella speaks about the *deformation of history* and the incapacity of existence to reach a transcendental sphere, and it corresponds to the grotesque state of being in the basic situation of the stories in *Decameron*. The tendency to secularise and desacralise the Church as institution, the parodic and satirical way of representation of the priests and the ritual ceremonies can be

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72   It is the seventh story of the second day.
73   И. П. Смирнов [I.P. Smirnov], "О смысле краткости," in *Русская новелла. Проблемы теории и истории*, ed. В. М. Марковича and В. Шмида (Санкт-Петербург: Издательство С.-Петербургского Университета, 1993), 5-13.

"qualified" as a result of invalidation of rite in the novella-genre (to make a stereotype, a cliché of a ritual order is one of the distinguishing marks of the novella, as Smirnov argues).[74]

Although Smirnov describes the (we should add: *modern*) genre of the novella as a topic of "nothing", as the absence of any order of life, in his study he also states that the novella genre, demonstrating the impossibility of the choice, can triumph over this "nothing" only if it is united in a cycle, because of *the continuity of the narrating activity*, which is able to ignore and destroy the impossibility of the concept of history and the choice for the hero(es) being hidden in the single stories. In this way the continuous narrating act becomes the main topic and, at the same time, the "metatopic" of the work. In the novella cycle the crisis of the choice (or the choice of crisis) is always followed by a new beginning, when the "nothing" of the referential situation conflicts with the continuous narrating activity, neglecting this "nothing."[75] Connecting it with the Bakhtinian thought, we can say that the chaos, the reversed order of the world may be renewed and regenerated just in the continuously repeated and cycled act of narration (see Pampinea's words addressed to Dioneus in the introduction of the first day: "such things as are without meane and measure, are subject to no long continuance").[76] In this sense the "new life" described by Bakhtin as a beginning, deriving from the chaos of the carnival, can be created only in the artistic work of the narrating word, or otherwise with the help of the poetic activity of the narrating language. This idea also enlightens the potential meaning of 'renewal, rebirth' of the metaphoric word *novella* in the *Introduction* that is to be interpreted in the sense of a story-cycled genre which has stepped towards a new genre, *the genre of the novel*.

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74 И. П. Смирнов [I.P. Smirnov], "О смысле краткости," 10-11.

75 The continuity of narration is clearly demonstrated by the repeating formula used by the main narrator of the book, signing the topic of the ten days: "*Endeth* here the first day of the Decameron; *beginneth* the second […]" ("*Finisce* la prima giornata del DECAMERON: *incomincia* la seconda…" Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 65 (emphasis added)) etc., and grammatically using every time the form of the simple present.

76 "Ma per ciò che le cose che sono senza modo non possono lungamente durare (…)" Boccaccio, *Decameron,* 20.

Thus the *Decameron* is created and held by the power of narration. The discursive power is manifested in the novellas as the rhetoric of language, whether in the sense of convincing oration (like in Korax), or in its Aristotelian meaning of the possibilities of convincing in all possible fields, or in its Platonic sense as flattery, delusion and deception. It seems evident that the unifying topic of Boccaccio's novellas can be found not in the various stories, but in the many-sided representation of *the power of the human word*. The rhetorical power of the language becomes most perceptible in the summary of the central topic of the sixth day ("wherein, under the rule of Elisa, discourse is had of such as by some sprightly sally have repulsed an attack, or by some ready retort or device have avoided loss, peril or scorn"), but the whole situation of the retired company and the story-telling process has to be considered as a rhetorical situation, created by Madam Pampinea's good argumentation (as Philomena declares: "the case propounded by Madam Pampinea hath beene very well delivered"). The narrator protagonists of the *Decameron* usually praise the rhetorical power of language (see Madam Fiametta's remark in the beginning of the fifth novella of the first day: "It is no little joy to me, that we understand so well (by the discourses already past) what power consisteth in the delivery of wise and readie answeres"), and nearly all of the stories can be described by the act-determining power of speech, so from a poetic point of view, by the thematization of its story-generating force. Just to cite three examples: the already mentioned adventures of Andreuccio da Perugia: all the three events take place because of the rhetorical delusion of speech 5/II.); Zima's rhetorical virtuosity in the fifth novella of the third day where the hero is able to arouse a wife's love in a one-sided "dialogue" delivered in the presence of the husband; and finally the triumph of rhetoric in the ninth story of the seventh day, where language can destroy the sensual experience and make the hero believe that what he had been seeing had not happened.

Nevertheless, the *Decameron* as a *whole*, as a cycle of novellas demonstrates not only the amazing, deceiving and convincing rhetorical force of the human word, but also its poetic power which has the indexes of joy and consolation. The generating force of the poetic word can be perceived first of all in the cycle of novellas as a renewed genre. And we probably may find in it the final poetic, and at the same time the structural intention of the *Decameron*.

PART II.

Innovations and Theoretical Questions of Modern Prose

Rewriting and Semantic Innovation in the Novels of Alessandro Baricco (*Novecento* and *Silk*)

Alessandro Baricco is one of the most famous and popular writers alive today, an author whose novels have become bestsellers in many European countries. In spite of or rather precisely because of his prominence, his position in contemporary literary scholarship is worthy of some discussion. In this chapter, I am going to make an attempt to explore some elements of the aesthetic and linguistic experience of two of his most successful works, *Novecento* and *Silk*.

Obviously, the archaic and universal topos of the *journey* acts as an engine of the plot in both texts. In *Novecento,* the use of the ship or the sea as symbols of individual life and the world goes back to ancient authors, such as Alcaeus or Horace,[77] as well as the character of Ulysses in Greco-Roman mythology. The character and story of Novecento, who is found on the ship as an infant and never leaves the ship throughout his life, represent a modern reinterpretation of the Ulysses myth.

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[77] Bécsy Ágnes, "*Osztályrészem*" in *"Halljuk, miket mond a lekötött kalóz." Berzsenyi-versek elemzése* (Budapest: Krónika Nova, 1998), 18.

Ulysses is embedded in our cultural consciousness both as an emblem of the homecoming hero and an eternal wayfarer whose unquenchable desire for knowledge constantly drives him towards new destinations. The same pursuit of knowledge is characteristic of Novecento; however, his cognitive activity turns the commonplace antique metaphor of the ship inside out, thereby renewing it and rendering it analogous to the world: "Il mondo, magari, non l'aveva visto mai. Ma erano ventisette anni che il mondo passava su quella nave: ed erano ventisette anni, che lui, su quella nave, lo spiava. E gli rubava l'anima."[78]

However, the trope of the world transformed into a ship also redefines the cognitive activity of Novecento ("E gli rubava l'anima") as an imaginary activity that converts the elements of reality into *signs*, combining them in a unique way to create a completely new world. This activity is not to be approached from the aspect of discovery and the action of experiencing defined as a cognitive act, but rather the creative process of comprehension:

> In questo era un genio, niente da dire. Sapeva ascoltare. E sapeva leggere. Non i libri, quelli son buoni tutti, sapeva leggere la gente. I segni che la gente si porta addosso: posti, rumori, odori, la loro terra, la loro storia… Tutta scritta, addosso. Lui leggeva, e con cura infinita, catalogava, sistemava, ordinava… Ogni giorno aggiungeva un piccolo pezzo a quella immensa mappa che stava disegnandosi nella testa, immensa, la mappa del mondo, del mondo intero, da un capo all'altro, città enormi e angoli di bar, lunghi fiumi, pozzanghere, aerei, leoni, una mappa meravigliosa. Ci viaggiava sopra da dio…"[79]

This activity of Novecento is described by the elements of creating fiction, and each stage of the process corresponds to the acts of creating fiction defined by Wolfgang Iser as selection ("sapeva leggere la gente. I segni che la gente si porta addosso"), combination ("catalogava, sistemava, ordinava"), and the "as if" structure of the self-disclosure of the text characteristic specifically of literary fiction, through which the text reveals its own fictional nature ("Ci viaggiava sopra da dio"). The "external," horizontal

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78   Alessandro Baricco, *Novecento* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002), 33.
79   Baricco, *Novecento*, 33.

journey of Novecento becomes an imaginary inner journey at this point, which is associated with the criteria of creating literary fiction in the text of Baricco, making it clear why it is the artistic act of playing the piano that enables the hero to take this inner journey:

> Una volta chiesi a Novecento a cosa diavolo pensava, mentre suo-nava… […] Viaggiava, lui.
> E ogni volta finiva in un posto diverso: nel centro di Londra, su un treno in mezzo alla campagna, su una montagna così altache la nave ti arrivava alla pancia, nella chiesa più grande del mondo, a contare le colonna e guardare i faccia i crocefissi. Viaggiava.[80]

Thus *Novecento* thoroughly reinterprets the *Ulysses* story, elevating it to the level of the self-reflexive trope of creating an artistic fiction (liter-ary text). From this aspect it is possible to interpret the end of the story (Novecento waiting on the ship to be exploded with it) in a metaphorical way: Novecento can never leave the ship, since he has been "inscribed" into it; his relationship with the ship is the same as an author's relationship with his/her text. It illustrates another major difference from the character of Ulysses: whereas Ulysses finally arrives back in Ithaca after twenty years of wandering, for Novecento leaving the ship would mean leaving the text (the fiction). Even the name *Novecento*, doubling as the title of the novel, identifies the hero with the *text* itself.

However, as the author is Italian, it is highly probable that the crucial Ulysses pretexts of *Novecento* are derived neither from stories revealed and reconstructed in the course of research into mythology nor from the epics of Homer, but rather from their best-known rewriting in Italian, the U-lysses episode in Canto 26 of *Hell* in the *Divine Comedy* by Dante. This also seems likely in light of the fact that in the canto, instead of a recitation by the Greek hero of the adventures familiar from earlier sources, a "fictive" last journey is recounted during which he and his companions travel be-yond the columns of Hercules, i.e. the Strait of Gibraltar, and God sinks their ship. It is not only the moment of sinking that has an analogue in the Baricco novel but also the fact that Dante depicts Ulysses as an "eternal

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80   Baricco, *Novecento*, 32.

wanderer" who keeps starting his journeys again. In the context of wandering Ulysses becomes insignificant and unable to function in Dante's text, as does the opportunity of disembarking for Novecento.

Another link between the section of the poem by Dante and the Baricco text is provided by the subtitle of the latter ("Un monologo"), which evokes the genre of the Ulysses episode. Furthermore, the narrative structure of Baricco's novel, in which first person singular narration by the trumpet player is unexpectedly taken over by Novecento, the main character, apparently reflects the structure of Dante's section, where the Greek hero inserts his own earlier oration[81] addressed to his companions as a direct quotation in the monologue in which he recounts the last journey. The "personal narration in a monologue" form used by Baricco seems to repeat the "oration in a monologue" form of Dante.

The Ulysses episode was met with an extremely diverse array of responses, leading to several schools of interpretation in Dante studies. Perhaps the most acknowledged opinion, that of De Sanctis and Nardi,[82] according to which it represents a pagan desire for knowledge and inevitable grounding, only corresponds to the superficial theme of *Novecento*. The opposing standpoint, represented for example by Padoan,[83] assuming a close connection between the misdeed of wrong counsel and the last journey, cannot be related to *Novecento*. However, the interpretation of Boitani,[84] according to which the episode is the expression of an unconscious death wish, arguing that after learning about existence, i.e. the journey as far as the strait, Ulysses wishes to know non-existence, that is existence as nothing and nothing as existence.

The relationship of nothing and Novecento has an important function in the work of Baricco: the main character is born of "nothing" and after the death of his foster father he disappears into nothing for 24 days (as described in the novel: "Lo cercavano per tutta la nave, per due giorni. Niente. Era sparito."[85] and he even qualifies as *nothing* for the world:

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81 "Considerate la vostra semenza: Fatti non foste a viver come bruti, Ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza." (*La Divina Commedia, Inf.*, XXVI 118-120.)

82 Francesco De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura I* (Bari: Laterza, 1925), 183; Bruno Nardi, *Dante e la cultura medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1942), 94.

83 Giorgio Padoan, "Ulisse *fandi fictor* e le vie della sapienza. Momenti di una tradizione (da Virgilio a Dante)," in *Il pio Enea a l'Empio Ulisse* (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 186-187.

84 Pietro Boitani, *L'ombra di Ulisse* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), 46-47.

85 Baricco, *Novecento*, 23.

> A voler essere precisi, Novecento non esisteva nemmeno, per il
> mondo: non c'era città, parrochia, ospedale, galera, squadra di ba-
> seball che avesse scritto da qualche parte il suo nome. Non aveva
> patria, non aveva data di nascita, non aveva famiglia. Aveva otto
> anni: ma ufficialmente non era mai nato.[86]

Novecento does not have a reference in the world and in this respect he
acts as the poetic function of Roman Jakobson: instead of reference to ex-
ternal reality he is mainly characterised by self-referentiality, that is, he al-
ways refers to himself and signifies himself. In thematic respects this means
that it is Novecento's isolation and alienation from the world that enables
him to be active in the creative world of fantasy.

The relationship of the hero and narration has the following implica-
tions. The anything but signified nature of Novecento in the world may be
interpreted as a lack of identity, which is confirmed at the end of the novel
by the self-confession of the hero about the conscious elimination of desires
and "emptying life": in this respect the death of the hero, announced at the
end of the novel, is an inevitable consequence of the process of self-de-
struction. Nevertheless, the activity appearing to be the elimination of the
self takes place as an imaginary process, during which Novecento identifies
himself with various people, situations and activities, that is, possible roles,
and in this way creates numerous versions of his own self. This process may
be defined as the creation of "narrative identity" as described by Ricoeur.
It is confirmed by the fact that after developing different patterns of iden-
tification Novecento discards them, resisting the temptation of false iden-
tification.[87] This is why the change in narration at the end, when the hero
takes over the narrative function and starts to interpret his life in the form
of personal narration (as Ricoeur would say, creates his *life story*), is of great
significance. Thus Novecento's monologue and assumption of the role of
narrator act as the process of self-interpretation and self-apprehension in
the text.

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86   Baricco, *Novecento*, 22.
87   Paul Ricoeur, "A narratív azonosság," 24-25.

The aforementioned statement of the narrator, according to which Novecento created the imaginary versions of his self from other people *by reading signs*[88] they bear, implies the same process: a process during which the narrator protagonist creates his own narrative identity in the course of "reading" the life of others. In this respect, Baricco's text represents the creation of identity by Novecento and the process of creating and recreating the self through others, in the course of which it makes the hero the trope of self-comprehension and self-creation of readers.

Accordingly, the connection between Dante's Ulysses and Baricco's Novecento is perhaps best described in the words of Béla Hoffmann, a distinguished Hungarian Dante scholar:

> Ulysses is a slave to cognition, to the cognitive activity of accumulating new knowledge in the relation of subjects and objects and devouring novelty without becoming affected by it. Knowledge acquired (pirated) in this way always remains external and does not assist the hero in the ontological act of comprehending himself. (…) It implies that Dante emphasises the insufficiency of making a horizontal journey in the 'external' space as a means of learning about existence, gaining experience and the necessity of an internal, spiritual-moral, vertical journey.[89]

From this aspect *Novecento* may be construed as the fulfilment of the requirement of Dante.

The structure of the plot of the novel entitled *Silk*, published two years later, in 1996, is based on four horizontal spatial journeys, clearly indicating its connections to another early work in Italian literature, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*. With regard to *Novecento,* this connection is probably not without significance, since Marco Polo was a contemporary of Dante, and as a Marco Polo scholar notes, "the year 1298, when he dictated his memoirs, is almost the same time as the turn of the century, in the Holy Week

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88   See the section quoted above: "sapeva leggere la gente. I segni che la gente si porta addosso: posti, rumori, odori, la loro terra, la loro storia… Tutta scritta, addosso." Baricco, *Novecento*, 33.

89   Hoffmann Béla, "Határon innen és túl. Az Ulyxes-monológ interpretációs kérdései." *Helikon* 47, no. 1-2 (2001): 375-376.

of which Dante placed his otherworldly journey."[90] It is of special interest
for our analysis that Ramusio, who was the first to publish *The Book of Ser
Marco Polo* two centuries after Marco Polo's adventures, likened Polo to the
wandering Ulysses, "who upon arriving home in Ithaca was not recognised
by anyone."[91]

Several parallels may be drawn between *Silk* and *The Book of Ser Marco
Polo*, the most obvious of which is the sujet structure describing the long
journeys to the east. While Polo travels to Mongolia and China, Hervé Jon-
cour, the main character of Baricco, travels to Japan. Both works recount
several journeys: the former tells the journey of Marco Polo's father and
uncle and then a journey they make together with the hero, while *Silk* is
based on four journeys by Joncour. The main character is a wealthy mer-
chant in both cases who becomes even richer as a result of the journeys.
The lives of the two protagonists also end in similar ways: although the life
of Polo following the conclusion of his travels is not included in the book.
According to scholars, he did not embark on any more journeys, but rather
gave up trading and continued to live as a rich and influential person and a
member of the city council of Venice until his death 29 years later.[92] All this
recurs in the first sentences of the last chapters of *Silk*:

> Hervé Joncour visse ancora ventitre anni, la maggior parte dei
> quali in senerità e in buona salute. Non si allontanò piú da La-
> villedieu, né abbandonò, mai, la sua casa. Amministrava saggia-
> mente i suoi averi, e ciò lo tenne per sempre al riparo da qualsiasi
> lavoro che non fosse la cura del proprio parco.[93]

The structure and form of the two books are also similar: the mosa-
ic-like composition used to describe the book on Polo is characteristic of
the short, usually 2-3-page, numbered chapters of Baricco, and the detailed
specification of the stops on the journeys is also typical of both works.[94]

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90 Vajda Endre, "Bevezetés [Introduction]," in *Marco Polo utazásai* [*Adventures of Marco Polo*], trans.
    Vajda Endre (Budapest: Osiris, 2003), 9.
91 Vajda, "Bevezetés [Introduction]," 14.
92 Vajda, "Bevezetés [Introduction]," 15.
93 Alessandro Baricco, *Seta* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1999 (1996)), 100.
94 In this respect there are also differences: while all the three parts of the book on Polo are based
    on such enumeration, in the case of Baricco it is only characteristic of the chapters describing the
    journeys of Hervé Joncour, i.e. chapters 12, 17, 19, 24, 31, 38, 43 and 50.

It seems that the virtual location of *Silk* in South France is to some extent also motivated by the same pretext, through a philological connection: it is well-known that the work of Marco Polo, which was extremely popular all over Europe, was circulated in hand-copied manuscripts, and until the start of printing it existed in some 150 variations. The original copy was lost, and the original language was debated subject of debate for a long time. At first it was thought to be Latin, but then philological research revealed that the Latin versions were translations of Italian sources which were based in turn on a poorly written *French* text.

The relationship between the genres of the two texts offers special insights. It is well-known that *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* was not written by Marco Polo himself, but he dictated it to a certain Rusticiano or Rustichello during his captivity in Genoa. The text reveals that Rustichello did not only act as the recorder of the text but also as an editor: he was the one to divide the travels of Polo into three books (in line with the chronological order) containing numbered chapters. The *First Book*, which summarises the two journeys as a "framework story" (recounting the life of Marco and his father until their homecoming in 1295), seems to be opposed to the parts dictated by Polo: this *First Book* is not an itinerary but a *novel-like story*. (All titles of the chapters of the *First Book* start with the interrogative word *How*, e.g. "How did the two brothers pass Soldaia?", and this type of title is not as common in the other two books, indicating that the *First* one is more dynamic, primarily focusing on activities and their quality, instead of on the static description of objects, scenes and traditions.) In this respect the demonstrated aims of *Silk* to rewrite *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* represent a conscious return to the origins and headspring of narratives and the novel form, transforming the topic of journey into a temporal and cultural journey and poetically-historically relating the text to cultural and literary tradition.

The success of *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* at the time was due to *story-telling*, *narrating stories* of wonderful strange landscapes and people. And, as emphasised by Rusticiano, Polo had earned the appreciation of Great Kublai Khan[95] with his skill, which he often used in relating extraordinary events and customs. Chapter 15 of the *First Book* focuses on the deliberate purpose of Polo to narrate stories and describe landscapes:

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95 "Or torna messer Marco al Grande Cane co la su ambasciata, e bene seppe ridire quello perch'elli era ito, e ancora tutte le meraviglie e 'lle nuove cose ch'egli avea trovate, sicché piacque al Grande Cane

> E quando lo Grande Cane vide in questo giovane tanta bontà, mandollo per suo messaggio a una terra, ove penò ad andare sei mesi.
>
> Lo giovane ritornò: bene e saviamente ridisse l'ambasciata ed altre novelle di ció ch'elli lo domandò, perché 'l giovane avea veduto altri ambasciadori tornare d'altre terre, e non sappiendo dire altre novelle de le contrade fuori che l'ambasciata, egli li avea per folli, e dicea che più amava li diversi costumi de le terre sapere che sapere quello perch'egli avea mandato. E Marco, sappiendo questo, aparò bene ogni cosa per ridire al Grande Cane.[96]

The obviously fictive words ("che più amava li diversi costume de le terre sapere che sapere quello perch'egli avea mandato") of the Khan are especially noteworthy, and they probably (also) reveal the leaning of Rusticiano towards story-telling, demonstrating the marked and conscious *separation of the referential and poetic function*, as well as the predominance of the latter. The phrase "che più amava" used by Rusticiano indicates the priority of aesthetic experience and the intrinsic value (and self-referentiality) of story-telling. It is of particular relevance to *Silk*, as story-telling and narrating the "wonders" of foreign landscapes becomes a defining activity of the protagonist, who has had many adventures, by the end of the novel:

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e tutti suoi baroni, e tutti lo comendaron di grande senno e di grande bontà;e dissero, sevivesse, diventerebbe uomo di grandissimo valore. Venuto di questa ambasciata, sì 'l chiamò il Grande Cane sopra tutte le sue ambasciate." Marco Polo, *Milione. Le divisament dou monde, Il Milione nella redazioni toscana e franco-italiana*, ed. Gabriella Ronchi (Milano: Mondadori, 1982), 16.

"Quant Marc fu retorné de sa mesarie, el s'en vait devant le grant kan et li renunse toute le fait por coi il estoit alés et l'avoit achevee moult bien puis li dit toutes li novités et toutes le coses qu'il avoit veu(ç) en cele voie, si bien et sajemant que le grant kan, et celç tuit que l'oient, en unt grant mervoie, et distrent entr'aus: se cest jeune vif por aajes il ne puet falir qu'il ne soit home dr grant senç et de grand valor. Et que voç en diroie? De cest messajerie en avant, fu appelé. le jeune, mesere Marc Pol, et ensi le apelara desormés nostre livre. Et c est bien grant raison, car il estoit sajes et costumés." Polo, *Milione. Le divisament dou monde,* 319.

96   "Et quant le grand kaan voit ke Marc estoit si sajes, il le envoie mesajes en une tere que bien hi poine (a) alet VI mois. Li jeune baçaler fait sa enbasee bien et sajemant; et por ce qu'el avoit veu et oi plusors fois que le grant kan, quant les mesajes k'il mandoit por les diverses partes dou monde, quant il retornoient a lui et li disoient l'anbasee por coi il estoit alés et no li savoient dir autres noveles de les contrees ou il estoient alés, il disoit elz qu'il estoient foux et non saiçhan(ç) et disoi(t) que miaus ameroit oir les noveles et les costumes et les usajes de celle estran(j)es contree qu'il ne fasoit oir celç por coi il li avoit mandé, et Marc, ke bien savoie tout ce, quant il ala en cele mesajerie, toutes les nuvités et tutes les stranges chauses qu'il avoit, met(t)oit son entent por coi il le seust redire au grant kaan." Polo, *Milione. Le divisament dou monde*, 318.

"Col tempo iniziò a concedersi un piacere che prima si era sempre negato: a coloro che andavano a trovarlo, raccontava dei suoi viaggi. Ascoltandolo, la gente di Lavilledieu, imparava il mondo e i bambini scoprivano cos'era la meraviglia."[97]

Thus for Novecento as for Hervé Joncour, who "era d'altronde uno di quegli uomini che amano *assistere* alla propia vita, ritenendo impropria qualsiasi ambizione a *viverla,*"[98] alienation from and discarding life transforms life into art. Nothing, the poetic topos of the creation and evolvement of narrative art, is presented in the novel in the multiply signified metaphoric network of connections between *nothing* and the eastern, Japanese world (which, in the words of the novel, is beyond the end of the world), the *invisible*, *silk*, the *eggs of silkworm* and *mulberry leaves*.

More or less implicitly, the central question of both works by Baricco is *the creative process*, and both focus on the metaphorisation of *nothing*. However, Baricco's practice of intentionally relying on the beginning of Italian literature (the works of Dante and Marco Polo) seems to contradict the topic of "creating something from nothing". But this historical orientation may also be regarded as invoking and rewriting the very first moment of creating literature, which is necessarily not the act of creating something from nothing anymore, but rather the continuation and renewal of tradition.

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97   Baricco, *Seta*, 100.
98   Baricco, *Seta*, 10.

Béla Hamvas's Theory of Novel
and Imre Kertész's *Fatelessness*

Béla Hamvas is one of the most peculiar Hungarian thinkers, whose *oeuvre* has not been sufficiently studied; moreover, it is only being discovered these days. There are only few articles in Hungarian which refer to some of his essays or touch upon his novel *Carnival*, but he is not regarded to be an over-represented author in Hungarian critical reception. The reason for this seeming disinterest lies in his biography on the one hand, and also in the historical and political circumstances. A year after the communist change, he was fiercely attacked by György Lukács, ideological leader of Hungarian literary policy, for his essay entitled *Revolution in the Arts, Abstraction and Surrealism in Hungary* written and published jointly with his wife, Katalin Kemény in 1947.[99] Consequently in 1948 Hamvas lost his job in the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library where he had worked since 1927, and in order to be able to provide for his wife and himself, he was obliged to work as an unskilled worker, then for 14 years as a stock-keeper at the Company of Investment for Power Stations in the country, quite far from the capital. In this period his writings had been distributed illegally in the so called *samizdat* form. The legal publication of his books and articles became possible only after the change of regime in 1989.

On the other hand, the lack of a deeper and sensible interpretation of Hamvas's essays in Hungarian literary criticism can be explained partly by the variety of the topics about which he wrote including music, visual arts, or a parabolic novel but, most of all, by his special interest in the spiritual tradition of ancient, prehistoric humanity so as to recover the possible way and method for reconstructing the completeness of existence. This esoteric and transcendental inclination had nothing in common either with the dominating trends and paradigms of literary theory of that age (structuralism, semiotics, or linguistic poetics) or with the later theoretical approaches like aesthetics of reception, deconstruction, or gender studies. To recall his own words, the experience that determines his thinking is universal orientation and transparent existence,[100] which refers to the contradiction between the authentic, trustworthy existence and the modern world.

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99 Hamvas Béla and Kemény Katalin, *Forradalom a művészetben. Absztrakció és szürrealizmus Magyarországon* (Budapest: Misztótfalusi 1947).
100 Hamvas Béla, "Regényelméleti fragmentum (1948)," in *Arkhai* (Budapest: Medio, 2002), 306.

Nevertheless, Béla Hamvas also wrote the *Fragment of a Theory of Novel*,[101] an essay that, regardless of its title, cannot be called a real fragment due to its consequent and detailed way of explanation and the eighty-page length. This work, in our opinion, is an original and productive study even in the context of the findings of international scholarship of the novel. It is based on the phenomenological and personalistic philosophy of Max Scheler, whose thought, however, is proved to be overcome by Hamvas. Hamvas, in contrast with the majority of narrative theories, tries to depict, describe and understand the internal, constitutive form and not the external system of narrative instruments and methods of this literary genre. Its significance lies in the interpretation of the concept of the genre as an autonomous notional form that generates meaning instead of its descriptive interpretation as a mimetic or explicative form.

The starting point of his theory can be determined with the help of his statement, according to which the origins of the modern novel and the first modern novel-hero can be revealed in Cervantes' *Don Quijote*. The novel as a genre has obviously existed before, but it appears as a *form* here. The distinction between genre and form in poesy, and thus in literature, corresponds to the difference between paint and colour in the art of painting: the clue to this separation can be found in the concept of the sense; as Hamvas says "the colour is paint with a sense and the form is a genre with a sense."[102] Therefore the work of Cervantes realizes a new form, a new consciousness, a new life-conception of European man, and in addition, and also in contradiction, to the so-called real story, it develops the *personal story* of European man.

The distinction between real and personal story in Hamvas is based on his double concept of *reality*. *Reality*, he argues, is the same that of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*: it is a false, unilateral concept supported by the modern state, power, science and philosophy, and shows favour only toward *one* kind of man. The "purpose" of the introduction of this concept is simply the justification of the man of power and of his absolute, exclusive right to life, as if this reality was the only truth. It was Don Quijote who realized that this reality had nothing to do with truth or real life: he opposed and acted against it by creating his "windmill-reality." Afterwards, his fight was continued by Hamlet, Tristram Shandy, Dostoevsky's Duke Miskin, and so on.

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101 Hamvas, "Regényelméleti fragmentum (1948)," 263-339.
102 Hamvas, "Regényelméleti fragmentum (1948)," 277.

Consequently Hamvas offers an *ontological* theory of the novel, which operates with the concept of *reality* as non-authentic existence and with the term *truth* or *verity* to indicate "real" existence. But the existential-ontological approach of Hamvas has a historical dimension as well connecting this *reality* to the formation of the modern state and society at the beginning of the seventeenth century. He affirms that the world crisis started when science and philosophy appropriated and accepted this concept of reality. At this point European (hi)story split into two parts and none of them wished to know about the other. The first one is the story of the community, the state, the economy and sciences; whereas the second starts with Don Quijote who *did not accept* this reality and founded a separate story: a *personal* one. Hamlet's secret is equivalent: in his case the festive story of a community is linked and fights with his personal story. This is the so called "Hamlet-situation," and it is also obvious that Hamlet is a novel-hero in Hamvas's conception. So, after Cervantes we name our life the impossible way as we are living our "windmill-life" *novel.* In one word, our life since that moment has become a novel: "we all live in the novel, not in history."[103]

The anti-discourse, the anti-story of Cervantes *cannot* be characterized as a story of an individual, as a story of the "I": this is a story of a *person*, who has a personality, who is a *subject*. Hamvas lays special emphasis on the idea that this person-subject cannot be conceptualized as some biological, social or psychological entity: in result the subject is indeterminable and indefinable.[104] And the novel as a genre-form is interested *exclusively* in the story of the person as subject.[105]

According to Hamvas, the novel declares the human claim to have a personal, subjective fate, an own, private story: the breakthrough of the personality was obtained by Don Quijote and Hamlet, afterwards all Europe became rapidly aware of the demand on personal fate stressed by the novel.

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103 Hamvas, "Regényelméleti fragmentum (1948)," 278.
104 Hamvas, "Regényelméleti fragmentum (1948)," 282.
105 Here I would like to briefly refer to Paul Ricœur's theory of narrative identity, in which we may find a similar differentiation between the ancient form of the identity of the hero, a total, unchangeable identity, and the form of it in modern novels and films where this identity undergoes significant changes, where the hero develops during the narration and the latter has as its function only to create and represent his dynamic identity. So, in spite of the evident differences between the language and the terminology of the two scholars, a striking similarity could be traced in their argumentations. Paul Ricoeur, "L'identité narrative," *Revues des Sciences Humanies*, 221 (1991): 35-47.

The "instinct of power," as Hamvas says, charges the person with betraying the community, while the novel makes him believe to have every right to do it. This is why the second archetype of the modern novel is represented by *Hamlet*. As our philosopher assumes the betrayal here is effected not by the hero, but by the community against the person, because the whole community yields to the man who have betrayed them: this type of man, like Claudius in *Hamlet*, will be called the *Great Inquisitor*, the most relevant form of which Hamvas discovered in Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that for Hamvas one of the Great Inquisitor's historical prototypes is represented by Cardinal Richelieu.

The novel is based on the ontological concept that truth in the human world is carried on not by the community, but the person. The "meaning" of the adventures before Cervantes can be described as the sacral acts of the hero who assumes and represents the common fate of the community. But Don Quijote is not a member of a group anymore; he is an outsider, a lonely person. Therefore the concept of *person* cannot be interpreted from a scientific point of view: it requires an explanation from the aspect of *the story of redemption*.[106] The person is neither an individual, nor a member of the collective entity (these two, the individual and the collective have a strong connection and a polar tension between each other): he, the person, assumes the "sin," as Raskolnikov does in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, to achieve his personal redemption which, paradoxically, always involves the problem of the salvation of the community, too. Eventually the person in the novel, curiously enough, reconciles with the community: this is why the novel *can* be a story of salvation, because it simply destructs the contradiction and the tension between the individual and society. This salvation story can be regarded as a drama of liberty for the person.

At this point I cannot help pointing out some similarity with the concept of the novel expounded by Milan Kundera. In his book *The Art of the Novel* Kundera contemplates in the following manner: "in every time all the novels search for the secret of the *I*. Creating an imaginary figure, a hero of a novel, you automatically face the question: what is the 'I'?"[107] We may remember that in Ricoeur's opinion the key of the modern novel is always

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106 Hamvas, "Regényelméleti fragmentum (1948)," 290-291.
107 Milan Kundera, *L'art du roman.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 28.

the dilemma of who I am.[108] And Hamvas's double interpretation of reality seems to return in another formula of Kundera which states that the novel always makes an analysis of the human life in a trap into which the world has been transformed.

As Hamvas confirms, the modern novel is rooted in the tension between liberty and necessity and has to be understood as the result of a *confession*. Confession as the first and primordial announcement of the subject is one of the determinant elements of the novel as for instance the monologue of Hamlet, Rousseau's *Confessions*, or Goethe's *Werther*. In this respect Schopenhauer's work has considerable importance since he turned philosophy into a novel when he placed the act of confession in the centre of his train of thoughts. His work was continued by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.[109]

The difference between the individual and the person becomes transparent actually in the *act of confession*: the individual believes in his own special salvation, in the possibility to be able to leave the others alone. This individual interest, however, will be recognized by the *confessional consciousness* which realizes the impossibility of self-redemption. In the confession the individual breaks off the person, whose consciousness comes through a transformation, realizing that the redemption can happen exclusively in an *interpersonal relation* that is with the help of another person. Thus in the act of confession the person subordinates his own interests and salvation to the salvation of the community: this act is clearly demonstrated in the etymology of the word *subject* which in Latin means *"subjicere,"* that is to "submit, subordinate."[110] At this point Hamvas's thought corresponds again to other representative novel-conceptions: on the one hand, with Ricoeur's study on the concept of subjective transformation or self-transformation of the modern hero, while on the other hand it is also related to the Bakhtinian thought of interpersonality in the novel, the triple connection between author, hero and reader. Moreover, Hamvas, similarly to Bakhtin, answers the theories postulating the crisis of the novel by emphasizing the emancipation of the hero.[111]

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108 Ricoeur, "L'identité narrative," 41.
109 Hamvas, "Regényelméleti fragmentum (1948)," 299-303.
110 Hamvas, "Regényelméleti fragmentum (1948)," 306.
111 Михаил Бахтин [Mikhail Bakhtin], "Проблемы поэтики Достоевского," *in Собрание сочинений VI*, (Москва: Русские словари, 2002), 5-300, esp. 203-300.

In the confession the individual transforms into a person and thus achieves a higher level of existence, and in this way he is able to annihilate his fate and convert it into salvation. The fate in the novel becomes a completely internal concept. The confessional act does not have to be regarded as a sort of metamorphosis, but as a development of the person. It offers the possibility of self-transformation, and this change is directed by liberty, and not by necessity. There is not any element in the story of a novel which would be a so-called external or objective event: the story is completely connected with the person. There is no person without a story in the novel.[112]

As for the problem of temporality, we can notice the duplicity of time in the novel. The external time which involves our sufferance can be "redeemed" with the help of the internal, subjective temporality which gives liberty to the person. This "salvation-time" could also be called apocalyptic. Whatever the end and the consequence of a novel is, it is always a step towards salvation, which reveals that everyone lives their own redemption-story.

I think that these thoughts on the nature of the novel genre could offer a key to the interpretation of the Hungarian writer Imre Kertész' famous *Fatelessness*.[113] First of all, the existential-ontological view of Kertész seems equivalent: he attempts, like Hamvas, to analyse the existential situation of man in order to explain the poetic properties of the novel. The concept of reality is also evident in *Fatelessness*: as Hamvas states the great tragedies of history were always explained with the necessity, with the concept of *reality* which hides a simple thirst for power. This reality in Kertész' work is evidently represented by the concentration camps, by the Holocaust, which, quoting again Hamvas' words "doubts, moreover, absolutely denies man's right to a personal fate."[114] The same idea appears in Kertész' essay as "the life in a totalitarian state became the most important experience for the European way of existence and personal type, because it completely destructed not only

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112 Hamvas, "Regényelméleti fragmentum (1948)," 336.

113 Kertész Imre, *Sorstalanság* (Budapest: Magvető, 1975). English texts in this chapter are cited from Imre Kertész, *Fatelessness*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (London: Vintage Books, 2004). I have already published a longer study on this novel in Hungarian entitled *A Novel like a Short Story?* See: Horváth Kornélia, "A regény mint novella?" in *Irodalom, retorika, poétika* (Budapest: EditioPrinceps, 2009) 49-79.

114 Hamvas, "Regényelméleti fragmentum (1948)," 280.

the myth of the personality, but almost its concept as well."[115] The narrator protagonist of *Fatelessness*, the youngster Gyuri Köves, accepts this reality as a normal condition of life and existence without any reflection on it. This lack of reflection and the intensive sensuality of the narration provide the effectiveness and the narrative innovation of the novel. Actually, Gyuri Köves changes his mentality at the end of the book when in the dialogue with the two old Jewish men, Fleischmann and Steiner, he starts to interpret the events he had to undergo. He delivers a speech which can be considered as a *confession*, as he argues that he made *his own* steps, too, in this story. Actually, the metaphor *steps* appears as a concrete act in the first part of the novel at the beginning of the deportation-process from Budapest: despite the good occasion, Köves does not want to leave the line of the Jews, he loyally takes his steps with the moving queue. But eventually with his act of confession Köves makes an effort to create his own story and to become a subject, which transforms Kertész' text into a real novel. His argumentation "I too had lived through a given fate. It had not been my own fate, but I had lived through it […] I now need to start doing something with that fate […] after all, I could no longer be satisfied with the notion that it had been a mistake, blind fortune, some kind of a blander"[116] clearly demonstrates the demand of *personal fate*, the claim to deliberate from the conditions of "fatelessness." He appropriates his story and it means that he assumes the responsibility, too. This act in Hamvas is explicated in the following manner:

> The connection between sin and penitence [and here I have to mention that the English translation of the title of Dostoevsky's novel may lead to misunderstanding: in Russian the two key-words of the title rather mean 'sin' and 'penitence' rather than 'crime' and 'punishment'] is not necessary, but free. Man assumes that the punishment is the consequence of his free decision. This idea was not invented by Dostoevsky: it is a fundamental fact of every novel.[117]

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115 Kertész Imre, *Gályanapló* (Budapest: Magvető, 1992), 28.
116 Kertész, *Fatelessness*, 259.
117 Hamvas, "Regényelméleti fragmentum (1948)," 291.

And at the very end of the novel, the hero of *Fatelessness* is able to transform his terrible Holocaust-story into a story of salvation:

> For even there, next to the chimneys, in the intervals between the torments, there was something that resembled happiness. Everyone asks only about the hardships and the "atrocities," whereas for me perhaps it is that experience which will remain the most memorable. Yes, next time I am asked I ought to speak about that, the happiness of the concentration camps.[118]

There is a clear parallelism between Hamvas' and Kertész' interpretation of the concept of *fate*. Actually, Hamvas uses this word in a double sense: once it means 'destiny' implying that man is thrown into the world, while in other cases it means exactly the opposite: the sense of the created *personal fate*, the proper story. The enouncement of narrator Köves quoted above was organized and characterized by the same duplicity. Moreover, Kertész interprets the concept also in his volume of essays entitled *Galley-diary*:

> What do I call fate? In any case, the possibility of a tragedy. Although it is destructed by the external *determination* which squeezes our lives into a situation of a totalitarism, into nonsense: what I call *Fatelessness* is when we live our *determination* instead of the necessity following from our liberty.[119]

So *Fatelessness* is interpreted as *determination* in contrast with personal fate.

In line with Hamvas' ideas, Kertész' novel becomes a real novel only at the end, in the confession of the narrator protagonist. The author himself describes his work in a similar way claiming that there are no "free characters" in his text: the characters here have the function of thematic motifs: they are annihilated by the totalitarian "Structure." And similarly the narration itself is also dictated by the Structure, states Kertész, and our illumination consists of an analysis of our participation in the creation, in the

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118 Kertész, *Fatelessness*, 262.
119 Kertész, *Gályanapló*, 19.

formulation of the same Structure.[120] But, all the same, there is a possibility of illumination. In conclusion, I quote again the *Galley-diary*: "There can be a moment in our life, a minute of the awakening of self-consciousness: we will be born in that moment. The bud of a genius is hidden in every man, but not everybody is able to render his life his *own* life."[121]

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120 Kertész, *Gályanapló*, 30.
121 Kertész, *Gályanapló*, 16.

The Material in Artistic Form. Bakhtin in Conjunction with Foreign Theorists in the Early 20th Century

In this chapter we try to summarize some principal thoughts of Bakhtin on the problem of artistic form and to show some parallel ideas of other Russian and European, mostly Hungarian philosophers and writers. The basis of our study is the early Bakhtinian essay entitled *Content, Material and Form in Verbal Act*, written in 1924, but published only in 1975.[122]

This essay has as its starting point Bakhtin's well-known somewhat brutal critique of the ideas of the Russian Formalists and Viktor Žirmunsky. Writing about the "unsatisfactory nature"[123] of their scientific position, Bakhtin stresses the absence of a general aesthetic aspect of their poetics which results in an "incorrect or, at best, a methodologically indeterminate relationship between the poetics they are constructing and general, systematic, philosophical aesthetics."[124] Here Bakhtin criticizes the so called "formal method" in the name of the science about the essence of art in general, and considers poetics as a smaller "part" of aesthetics, dominated by a reduced, limited linguistic point of view.[125]

However, it is a fact of the history of literary theory that in the second period of his scientific activities Bakhtin mentions the word *aesthetics* much less frequently and returns to the use of the term *poetics*. It is enough to name the famous Dostoevsky study, first published in 1929, entitled *Problems of Dostoevsky's Work*,[126] and its rewritten second edition of 1963, where the author changed not only the "content" in a significant manner,

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122 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 257–325.

123 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 258.

124 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 258.

125 "Deprived of the basis provided by systematical philosophical aesthetics, poetics becomes unstable and fortuitous in its very foundations. Poetics systematically defined must be *an aesthetics of artistic verbal creation*. This definition emphasizes its dependence on general aesthetics." Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 260. As is well known, Pavel Medvedev, one of the so-called "masked-Bakthinian" authors, published a similar train of thought in his book. Without touching on the very sensitive and still controversial question of authorship, it is worth referencing it: M. M. Bakhtin and P. M. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, trans. Albert J. Wehrle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

126 М. М. Бахтин [Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin], *Проблемы творчества Достоевского (Ленинград: Прибой*, 1929).

but also the title, speaking already about the *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.[127] The change of terminology evidently implies or signals a change in his way of thinking. On the other hand, Bakhtin's critical remarks about the Russian Formalists are often weakly justified, testifying to some kind of prejudice. While this chapter does not aim to discuss Bakhtin's opinion of Formalist theory in detail, nevertheless his critical statements on the subject constitute a basis for his later argumentation about aesthetics. We shall therefore enumerate and partly refute some of his arguments concerning the so called "formal method."[128]

Bakhtin reproaches the Formalists for neglecting the "*unity of art – as a domain of unified human culture.*"[129] However, in a later part of his work he indirectly renounces the idealistic thought of the "unity of culture." Writing on the problem of content, he states: "A cultural domain has no inner territory. It is located entirely upon boundaries, boundaries intersect it everywhere, passing through each of its constituent features."[130]

His other, perhaps stricter reproof is that Formalist poetics "*clings to linguistics,*"[131] understood in a Saussurian sense, according to which language is a system of elements and rules, where these elements and rules can only be applied, but not created or modified by the speaker. However, even if we know that the linguistic approach in Formalist theory of literature can be criticized, it is neither unproductive nor mechanistic. Take, for instance, Jakobson's seminal essay, *Linguistics and Poetics,* written in 1958,[132] which reveals a very dynamic, almost Humboldtian conception of language,[133] especially with regard to the function of language in literature.

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127 Михаил Бахтин, [Mikhail Bakhtin], *Проблемы поэтики Достоевского (Москва: Советский писатель*, 1963). In English: M. M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

128 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 263.

129 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 260.

130 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 274.

131 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 261.

132 Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," in: *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960).

133 See W. von Humboldt, "Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluß auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts," in *Schriften zur Sprache*. (Stuttgart: Hrsg. v. M. Böhler, 1992), 30-207.

One of Bakhtin's "preconceptions" is that Formalist theory takes as its starting point the primacy of the *material*. This is why he names the Formalist approach "materialist aesthetics," where the "materialist" would mean a combination of the elements in a scientific, a mathematical sense. An approach like this, says Bakhtin, does not consider that an artist's work is always oriented towards values, towards the world and reality, and human relations in the world. Thus in the "materialist aesthetics," the aesthetically valid form can be *only the form of a given material*, Bakhtin claims.

It has to be stressed that these statements by Bakhtin on the so called "formal method" appear to be quite subjective. This is particularly evident in his views regarding the position of the receiver (recipient) in Formalist theory. The role of reception and of the receiver is clearly articulated in the Formalist and post-Formalist approach. It seems enough to remember Viktor Shklovsky's writings on Boccaccio's *Decameron*,[134] or Lev Vygotsky's analysis of the Bunin novella "*Gentle breath,*"[135] where the title is interpreted by Vygotsky as a metaphor of the activity of the reader and the process of reception of the novella. Briefly, for Vygotsky the "gentle breath" represents the rhythm of the breath of the reader of eponymously titled novella ("*Gentle breath*"), which gets quicker or slower, following the rhythm of the narration of the work.

Bakhtin's evaluation of the Russian Formalists' concept of *form* also appears a little extreme when he insists that for the Formalists, form is clearly material and static. One only needs to be reminded of Yuri Tynianov's conception of verse, representing a dynamic way of thinking about lyric verse and poetry. In Tynianov's interpretation, the "clue" to the form of lyric poetry is hidden in the *verse* which provides a rhythmic and lyrical aspect to a literary text. Tynianov, who was a "real" Russian Formalist, also emphasizes the modifying and deconstructing (!) power of verse, of the rhythm relating to the meaning of the words in poetry. This is a dynamic conception of form, which could never be considered a purely materialist one. Tynianov

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134 V. B. Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose: O teorii prozy*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park: Dalkey, 1990).

135 L. S. Vygotsky, "Bunin's *Gentle Breath*," in *The Psychology of Art. Introduced by A. N. Leontiev, Commentary by V.V. Ivanov.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The M.I.T. Press, 1971), 145–166.

and also Zhirmunsky (the latter is mentioned in Bakhtin's article several times as a "near follower" of the formal method) – formulate the necessary break with the popular analogy, according to which form would be a drinking cup "receiving" the content, which is the wine.[136]

Another criticism which Bakhtinian levels against the Formalists is that according to him, the "materialist aesthetics", which in the vocabulary of his essay means the "formal method", is incapable of constructing a history of art because it only deals with "isolated series."[137] One can put the question: may it be a history of art, or – to be more solid – the history of literature without "isolated series" or, better to say, without interpretations of different, autonomous literary works, novels, dramas and poems? As Paul de Man declared in one of his early studies entitled *Literary History and Literary Modernity*: what else could be literary history, if it not a series of text-interpretations?[138]

Having dealt with Bakhtin's critique of Russian Formalism, we must now pose the question how does he deal with the problem of *artistic form*, independently of his preconceived ideas about form in Russian Formalist thinking. His first claim concerns the "*emotional-volitional tension of form,*"[139] which introduces a psychologically and mentally inspired form-concept. To designate this new concept of form, Bakhtin coins a new term (or metaphor) – this is the concept of *architectonics*. The architectonics of form, as opposed to form as compositional, not only implies dynamic form, but also form of the (aesthetic) individuality and self-sufficiency. One of Bakhtin's examples of the difference between architectonics and composition is the rhythm of lyrical poetry:

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136 Ю. Н. Тынянов [Yu. N. Tynyanov], "Литературный факт," In *Поэтика. История литературы. Кино* (Москва: Наука, 1977), 262–263; В. М. Жирмунский [V. M. Zhirmunsky], "Задачи поэтики," in *Теория литературы. Поэтика. Стилистика* (Ленинград: Наука, 1977), 16. This theorical metaphor became gained currency in Russian theorical thinking on literature, and reappears in the preface of the famous Lotman book on lyric poetry. See: М. М. Лотман [M. M. Lotman], *Анализ поэтического текста. Структура стиха* (Ленинград: Просвещение, 1972), 37.

137 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 272.

138 Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity," *Daedalus* 99, no. 2. *Theory in Humanistic Studies*, (1970): 384–404, esp. 404.

139 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 264.

Rhythm can be understood in both ways – that is, as both an architectonic and a compositional form. As a form of ordering acoustic material which is empirically apprehended, heard and cognized, rhythm is compositional. But rhythm is architectonic when it is emotionally directed, when it relates to that value of inner striving and tension which it consummates.[140]

In Bakhtin's opinion, after defining the dilemma of content and material, we will be able to understand, "how form is, on the one hand, really material, and […] how *form takes us axiologically beyond the bounds of the work as organized material, as a thing*."[141] In relation with the problem of content he highlights, that

on the plane of ordinary thinking, the reality placed in opposition to art (although in such cases the word ususaly favored is »life«) is already essentially aestheticized; it is already an artistic image of reality […] It must be also remembered once and for all that no reality *in itself, no neutral reality* can be placed in opposition to art […][142]

It is interesting to note, that on the subject of the perception of reality and its connection with (artistic) form, a Hungarian thinker, Lajos Fülep states the very same idea and at the very same time as Bakhtin (in the above-quoted thought), namely in 1924:

There is no art without »content«, so without a philosophy of life, but the philosophy of life has to become completely an art, an artistic form. Everything that can be defined as "a content of material" may take place in art only if it becomes "form." The content of art is exactly the "form," so that which became form in

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140 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 270. Whith regard to rhythm in poetry, we are remined of I. A. Richards, who could be called a "founder" of, or who inspired American New Criticism in the thirties of the 20th century, and who emphasized the role of the *expectation of the reader* in his definition of rhythm in a lyric poem. I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism*: *A Study of Literary Judgement* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1930).

141 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 273–74.

142 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 276.

it. Where the content of the material and the form separate, there can be a view, a philosophy of life, but no art. (So it's meaningless to talk about the demand, the claim of the philosophy of life on form, and we have to be reconciled with it; a view of life always exists; the question is: what it *likes*?)[143]

Bakhtin emphasizes that neither the cognitive act, nor the ethical action (expressed "*as the relation of the ought reality,*") can understand and interpret the "reality" of the aesthetic objects, the works of art.[144] As he says, the "basic feature of the aesthetic that sharply distinguishes it from cognition and performed action is its receptive, positively accepting character, which enters into the work (or, to be exact, into the aesthetic object) and there becomes an indispensable constitutive moment."[145] This "positively accepting character" of a work of art is Bakhtin's unique insight, which embraces the ethical and existential moment of his way of thinking on a piece of art or literature.

Aesthetic activity does not create a reality that is wholly new. Unlike cognition and performed action, which create nature and social humanity, art celebrates, adorns, and recollects this preveniently encountered reality of cognition and action […] it creates the concrete intuitive unity of these two worlds.[146]

As the Hungarian poet-philosopher, Attila József said in 1928, in his essay entitled *Literature and Socialism* (remembering *Marxism and Philosophy of the Language*[147] of Bakhtin-Voloshinov), there are three human activities leading to an understanding of the world: cognition, intuition and inspiration (which means poetry for him).[148] The first two activities cannot

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143 Fülep Lajos, "Művészet és világnézet" ["Art and Philosophy of Life"], in *Művészet és világnézet* [*Art and Philosophy of Life*], ed. Tímár Árpád (Budapest: Magvető, 1976), 307; 260–309.

144 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 278.

145 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 278.

146 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 278–279.

147 V. N. Volosinov, (M. M. Bakhtin), *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambrige, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1986).

148 József Attila, "Irodalom és szocializmus (Művészetbölcseleti alapelemek) [Literature and Socialism (Basic Elements of a Philosophy of Art)]," in *Költészet és nemzet* [Poetry and Nation] (Budapest: Bethlen Gábor Könyvkiadó, 1989), 19–44.

perceive and think the world or reality entirely, in its completeness; it is only the poetic inspiration which can perceive and even *recreate reality*, since it gives it a *form*. In Bakhtin's words: "Art creates a new form and a new, axio-logical relation toward that which has already become reality for cognition and action […]."[149] The "boundaries" of this form assure the aesthetic value (compare Attila József: "The work of art is a limited infinity"), [150] which is the same as cognition and moral action. This is the famous Bakhtinian concept of *externalisation*: "Aesthetic form, as an intuitively uniting and consummating form, descends upon content from outside […] Form, embracing content *from outside, externalizes it, that is, embodies it.*"[151]

On the problem of material, Bakhtin speaks about the *material of the verbal art*, and makes a clear distinction between the concept of the linguistically defined word and the *énoncé* which is always concrete and unique, and performed in a cultural context or in a personal situation of life.[152] Bakhtin claims that poetry (and in this case he uses the word in the sense of 'literature') "needs language *in its entirety* […] Poetry does not remain indifferent to *any nuance* of the word studied by linguistics." And he adds: "Language in its entirety is not needed by any domain of culture save poetry."[153] As we see, it means that *poetry overcomes language as a linguistically determined entity* and needs, what is more, demands another language-concept, quite dissimilar to the one created and protected by synchronic and descriptive linguistics, which has orientated and determined our thoughts about language since the first decade of the 20th century, starting with Saussure's Geneva lectures. Bakhtin thus offers a new, a creative and active conception of language, which has its roots primarily in two theories of the 19th century: Humboldt's theory of language and the theory of discourse of the Ukrainian-Russian linguist and thinker (and a follower of Humboldt) Aleksander Potebnya.[154]

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149 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 279.

150 József, "Irodalom és szocializmus," 35.

151 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 282.

152 It is not an exaggeration, perhaps, to claim here Benveniste's consideration on the enouncement and, in a thight connection with it, his concept on the subjectivity created in discourse, formulated in the sixties of the last century: Émile Benveniste, "De la subjectivité dans le langage," *in Problémes de linguistique générale*, 1 (Paris: Gallimard 1966), 258-265.

153 Benveniste, "De la subjectivité dans le langage," 294.

154 А. А. Потебня [A. A. Potebnya], *Теоретическая поэтика* (Москва: Высшая школа, 1990).

Thus Bakhtin re-defines the role of language in literature in relation to the so-called "material." Bakhtin writes: "Poetry is no exception to the general proposition concerning all the arts: *artistic creation, determined in relation to its material, constitutes an overcoming of that material.*"[155]

Ultimately, Bakhtin illuminates the difference between the concept of composition and *architectonics* with reference to the profound architectonics has with his conception of language in literature:

> […] words in a poetic work combine into the whole of a sentence, a period, a chapter, an act, etc., and […] they create the whole of the hero's appearance, his character, his situation, the condition of his life, his actions etc. And, finally, they create the whole of an aesthetically shaped and consummated ethical event of a life […] That is to say, the process of realizing the aesthetic object, […] of realizing the artistic task in essence, is a process of consistently transforming a linguistically and compositionally conceived verbal whole into an architectonic whole of an aesthetically consummated event.[156]

With regard to the problem of form, Bakhtin envisages two possible modes of its conception: one is the material and compositional unity of the work, the other is the *architectonical* form of the work. The second of these modes would be form understood not only in the sense of "technique," but as form "with an artistic meaning," form "in activity." This notion of form as *activity*, or *energeia* so that form is in the "state" or process of creating is present already in Aristotle, in Humboldt, and Bergson. The latter writes in 1907 that form is equivalent to a way of living of life as a continuous and irreversible process. Form considered in this way, according to Bergson, should not be perceived as a photograph of the moment, but as a revelation, as a continuous elaboration of a completely new phenomenon which is common with *time*.[157] Finally, the conception of form as activity is also claimed by modern hermeneutics, especially in the thought of Gadamer.[158]

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155 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 294.
156 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 297.
157 Henri Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice* (Paris: PUF, 1984).
158 H. G. Gadamer, "The Artwork in Word and Image: 'So True, So Full of Being!'" in *The Gadamer reader: a bouquet of the later writings*, trans. and ed. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston: Northwestern

Following the idea of the activity of form, appropriated by Bakhtin from Wilhelm von Humboldt and his contemporary Ukraine-Russian linguist Potebnia, Bakhtin constructed his new idea of form as the *personality* of form, which means the possibility of recognizing one's own personality, one's own soul and body, which realizes and improves its generation in the received *artistic form*. Thus Bakhtin writes on an "aesthetically active *sub-iectum*":

> In form I *find myself*, find my own productive, axiologically form-giving activity, *I feel intensely my own movement that is creating the object*, and I do so […] not only during my own performance, but also during the contemplation of a work of art. *I must to some extent experience myself as the creator of form, in order to actualize the artistically valid forma as such.*[159]

That is why, according to Bakhtin, artistic form and the form of cognition are different: the first one has an "*author-creator*."[160] Bakhtin's formulation of the "personality of artistic form" touching upon the very subjective "field" of the human subject: "I must experience form as my own active, axiological relationship to content […] in form and through form […] I express my love, my affirmation, my acceptance."[161] "Thus, form is the expression of the active, axiological relationship of the author-creator and of the recipient (who co-creates the form) to content."[162] The question arises here: how can *form* be creative and created at the same time? how can it be a generating and a closed, a finite form? His answer is in the *isolation or detachment*,[163] in which we can find the influence of the Formalists' concept of the removal or defamilization ("ostranenie"). The achivement of isolation consists in the annulling of the content as a "thing".[164]

University Press, 1993), 195–224.
159 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 304.
160 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 304.
161 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 305.
162 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 306.
163 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 306.
164 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 307.

It is quite important to note that in writing on form and the formed material in art, Bakhtin uses the words *language* and *word*. "We emphasize that the point here is the feeling of generating of a signifying word. This is not a feeling of bare organic movement that generates the physical fact of the word, but a feeling of generating both feeling and evaluation […]".[165] And the Russian philosopher reveals the origins of the form-giving activity of "the author-creator and the contemplator" in the "possession of all the aspects of the word."[166] In Thsu according to Bakhtin,

> the governing constituent in the cognitive utterance is the referential, object-related meaning of the word, which strives to find its necessary place in the objective (object-related) unity of cognition. This objective unity governs and determines everything in a cognitive utterance […] What breaks through into the open first […] is rhythm (in the broadest sense of the word […].[167]

And here, in the conception of the word as rhythm, as an active soul and body, as *a phonic body*, we observe an overlap between Bakhtin's theory of form and the thoughts of his contemporary, the Russian poet, Osip Mandelstam. The conception of the articulated, sonorous word as an active intonation which signifies a kind of evaluation, but primarily the love of the person who pronounces it, is identical with Mandelstam's idea.[168] That is why Bakhtin stresses the role of lyric poetry amongst all the genres,[169] since here the author does not realize his isolation; on the contrary, he feels the unity of the productive tension in his body as a work of the rhythm and articulated sound, so he perceives himself "inside" the lyric poem, and not outside of it, as for example in a novel. Ultimately, this is also identical

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165 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 309.
166 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 309.
167 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 309–310.
168 Osip Mandelstam, "Conversation about Dante," in *The Poet's Dante* ed. Peter S. Hawkins and Rachel Jacoff (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 40-93. On the Russian concept of the word and language, see also: Thomas Seifrid, *The Word Made Self. Russian Writings on Languagae, 1860–1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005).
169 "The significance of the creating inner organism is not the same in all kinds of poetry. It is maximal in lyrics, where the body, generating the sound from within itself and feeling the unity of its own productive exertion, is drawn into form. The involvment of the inner organism in forrm is minimal in the novel." Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 314.

with Tynianov's (Formalist) concept of rhythm: "Thus, rhythm, attached to the material, is placed outside its boundaries and begins, of its own accord, to penetrate content as a creative relation to content, transporting it to a new axiological plane – the plane of aesthetic being."[170]

170 Bakhtin, "Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art," 315.

Conclusion

While studying the works of Dante, Boccaccio, Alessandro Baricco and Imre Kertész, the essays in the present volume focus on literary concerns of poetics, or more precisely genre theory. They have a dynamic approach to the relationship between artistic form and its material or the so-called content, i.e. the meaning or meanings inherent but legible in works of literature. This approach is based on the theoretical consideration of an early essay by Mikhail Bakhtin entitled *Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art*, the main concepts of which are discussed and explained in the last chapter. The previous chapters explore new and innovative readings and approaches to both Dante's *Vita Nuova* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and highlight the innovations in terms of genre poetics in the novels of two contemporary authors, Alessandro Baricco and Imre Kertész.

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