

"GOLD-DIGGERS WELCOME": RECENT HUNGARIAN PUBLICATIONS ON LITERARY THEORY

Bókay, Antal. *Irodalomtudomány a modern és posztmodern korban* [*Literary Theory in the Modern and Postmodern Period*]. Budapest: Osiris, 1997. 519 pp.

Bókay, Antal, and Béla Vilcsek. *A modern irodalomtudomány kialakulása* [*The Development of Modern Literary Theory*]. Budapest: Osiris, 1998. 635 pp.

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Antal Bókay's recent works—his monumental handbook of modern and postmodern literary theory as well as the anthology of basic positivist-formalist-structuralist writings, coedited with Béla Vilcsek—give us reasons to celebrate: these are fundamental tools for advanced literary studies in Hungary, indispensable for the serious student or teacher of literature. They would be landmark publications anytime anywhere, but in postcommunist Hungary in the last years of the decade (century, millennium), they seem to fill many gaps at once.

Those of us who are in the business of teaching the humanities in Hungary are only too aware of the missing primary tools of intellectual work: encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauruses, word finders, scholarly handbooks, etc. In literary studies this list also includes anthologies, companions, literary histories (with expanded or alternative canons), encyclopedias, as well as critical and annotated editions of major authors. During the many decades of underdevelopment in intellectual infrastructure such basic tools were not continuously prepared, revised, updated. But we cannot explain our distorted intellectual life with the lack of professionalism only: silencing, suppressing, indexing influential international authors accounts for why certain contemporaneous sensibilities and intellectual currents could not develop within the literary establishment as a whole—but only among those who read in three major European languages and had free access to foreign language publications.

There were too many missing links with the international intellectual community. Let me cite a few examples. Philosophers and thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Whitehead, Koestler, Polányi, Cassirer, Dewey, Gadamer, Bataille, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Bachelard, Baudrillard were either not translated at all into Hungarian or not representatively; Saussure, Wittgenstein, or Chomsky had to wait for decades to be published in Hungarian too. Modern psychological thinking could not become an integral part of the

intellectual apparatus. Freud, for example, only reappeared in the 1980s (at least in part); Jung, Erikson, and Maslow not at all. And, what is especially painful, such Hungarian born giants as Sándor Ferenczi, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, Lipót Szondi, or Károly Kerényi could hardly be read in Hungarian. Martin Buber and Elie Wiesel were perhaps too Jewish to appear, Teilhard de Chardin too Catholic, Mahatma Gandhi too disobedient and noncooperative, Betty Friedan and all the others too feminist. The list seems to be endless. All these absences created a distorted intellectual life, whose legacy is extremely hard to fight.

The American critic and writer Robert Grudin has a rather poor opinion about the consequences of Eastern Europe having been cut off from Western intellectual currents. This is what he writes about the legacy of a meager general education in theoretical disciplines in post-communist countries: "Never having been compelled to analyze information or educated to do so, they lack analytic skills and must fall back on street wisdom when reading a newspaper or confronting a personal challenge. Having little or no vocabulary for ideas, they cannot discourse abstractly or formulate large-scale economic or social issues" (97-98). I am afraid we all know what Grudin is talking about, even though Hungary is in many ways an exception. For example, we have all been to international conferences, where the discussion sessions act as an acid test. Or, to take another example, the theoretical disciplines, even in Hungary, tend to enter the university curriculum only late and sporadically—even though we supposedly give out M.A. degrees.

To return to the case of literary theory in Hungary, first, I think, we need to answer some basic questions. Is it necessary and/or possible to reclaim theory for the literary mind? Do the theoretical publications of the past 10+ years make up a trend to be consciously strengthened? Can we hope to share Europe's intellectual climate in the 1990s without having read and discussed Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger in the 1950 and '60s (as well as those who critiqued, refuted, and/or surpassed them), and then Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, and Kristeva in the 1970s and '80s, and now Jameson, bell hooks, and Kosofsky Sedgwick in the '90s? Is it possible to reset our intellectual mentalities without a prior resetting of social mentalities? Can alternate mentalities develop without a 1960s civil rights/student movement and the concomitant critique of old social mentalities on both left and right? In countries where such new mentalities did not come about, can we afford *not* to fast-digest the "pre-texts"? Can we afford not to consider the gain we receive by knowing about and teaching (without necessarily accepting) poststructuralism, postmodernism, feminism, deconstruction, or postcolonialism? Do we have the tools, as well as the readiness, for it?

Bókay's handbook on modern and postmodern literary theories offers a strong affirmative: it is possible thereby imperative to systematically rebuild our missing links. In fact, as the rather comprehensive bibliography proves, the cornerstones are already in place: the scholarly workshops of Pécs, Szeged, Debrecen, Szombathely, and Budapest testify to a visible revival of literary

theoretical activity. The two Osiris publications are major accomplishments in this field, signaling serious present and future work. They overlap to the degree that the handbook discusses major schools and trends from the beginnings to deconstruction, while its companion piece, the anthology, selects basic writings from positivism to structuralism. Hopefully the next anthology, displaying the canon of poststructuralist, postmodern, and deconstructive theory, is soon to appear. It is also imperative that Bókay go on with his handbook and discuss theoretical approaches organized by power, desire, gender, and sexuality; this, in turn, should be followed by another anthology: of feminist, psychoanalytic, gay and lesbian, postcolonial, etc., writings. This is a long process but is bound to yield gold for the pioneer gold-diggers—writers and readers alike.

Bókay's monograph of modern and postmodern theory would indeed be a landmark publication in any academic environment: an equal (especially once it gets published in English) in the prestigious club of such widely used basic critical histories and overviews as those of Culler, Lentricchia, Lietch, Berman, Eagleton, or Sarup—as well as such critical and annotated anthologies of basic writings as those of Lodge, Adams-Searle, Rifkin-Ryan, Makaryk, Richter, Davis-Schleifer, to name a few. The timeliness of Bókay's handbook is justified by the explosion of theoretical thinking of the past two-three decades, when the "tacit dimension" of scholarly understanding, to use Michael Polányi's phrase, has come under attack. When the basic assumptions, the Kuhnian paradigms, have broken down and no consensus holds on any front in the study of literature—when, as David Richter's fitting term implies, we have "fallen into theory" (see Richter)—the liveliest debates go on two or three "removes" away from the literary text proper. If Foucault is right about the difference between sex and religion being that sex is very interesting to do but boring to discuss, while religion may not be very interesting to practice but rather exciting to discuss (see Bernstein 142), then literature surely combines these two types of pleasure. It is, indeed, as enjoyable to "do" literature as to talk about it, as well as talk about talking about it. And so on.

Bókay accomplishes a grand sweep by starting out with the "alterity" of antiquity and the Middle Ages, then exploring modernity and postmodernity, delineating their concurrent hermeneutics in great detail. The book, he says in the Introduction, is a summary and introduction, treating the various readings of and discourses on literature as deriving from attendant reading strategies of the world. Using Jauss's model, Bókay offers two combinations of the Alterity-Modernity-Postmodernity scheme: in the binary framework Postmodernity comes under the heading of Modernity as its latest phase (Alterity-Modernity [Pre-Modern + Modern + Postmodern]), while in the tertiary model Postmodernity is a category on the same level with Alterity and Modernity, signalling a sharp division comparable to that between Alterity and Modernity (Alterity-Modernity [Pre-Modern + Modern]-Postmodernity). Although here at the beginning Bókay, in a commendable way, seems to leave the question open, the book as a whole opts for the tertiary model: by emphasizing the

deconstruction of metaphysical binaries in Western thought, the decentering and destabilizing activities of deconstruction, the questioning of stable structures by poststructuralism, and the general acceptance of indeterminacy by postmodernism, Bókay posits postmodernity's dramatic difference from modernity. (In fact, in its implication the book goes even further by suggesting that the epistemological break between modernism and postmodernism is stronger than that between alterity and modernism. For the modern remains within the realms of *metaphysicality* in its belief that behind the surface of things there is a grand design, an absolute structure, a world model, in structuralism's trust in the ultimate structure or system, myth criticism's faith in a vertical abstract system, Frye's totalizing spatial hermeneutics, phenomenology's theory of layers, etc. Only poststructuralism will question the stable order within language, its absolute center and identity, and only postmodernism will dis-assemble the spatial figure and de-structure the now dominant metaphysical formations of truth.)

All through the book Bókay treats strategies of reading and discourses on literature as sharing the same cultural climate—and thus certain basic assumptions—with contemporaneous works of art. Thus, Russian Formalism is described together with Russian avantgarde writing, while Borges and Calvino texts not only lend themselves for model postmodernist interpretations but also for illustrating the shared intellectual climate of postmodernity. The anthology follows a similar basic pattern: each school or movement is (i) portrayed within its intellectual "context," (ii) presented in terms of its theory, and (iii) put to work in interpretive essays. This mediation between cultural and literary theory, on the one hand, and discourse and text, on the other, is a significant merit of both books.

Bókay discusses **alterity** in detail in order to set the scene for the development of Western thinking: it was in antiquity and the Middle Ages when those problem- and solution clusters emerged which have since dominated our attitudes. (My only problem concerns word choice: *alterity*, in the sense used here, is not of the accepted terminology, however accurate it may be in this context. Moreover, the fact that Derrida, following Husserl, uses it in a very different sense, as "otherness and absence of meaning or self" [see Spivak liii], might create misunderstandings.) Alterity is characterized by a transcendental ontology, a trust in the presence of an invisible, mystical and spiritual essence behind the visible world. Allegory is its fundamental epistemological figure; hermeneutics, grounded in a mythological vision, is its "philosophy of language." Alterity, with its transcendental-kabbalistic-alchemical-allegoric position, will provide modernity and postmodernity with a ground for departures; thus clear definitions and presentations in these first chapters will enhance intelligibility later. Bókay discusses the Greek and Jewish hermeneutic traditions, as well as the allegorical hermeneutics of Christianity, both its early figures (Jesus, St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Thomas of Aquinas) and the great Reformers (Luther, Calvin). In conclusion, he suggests that Catholic and

Protestant hermeneutics have survived separately until the late 20th century: modern structuralism being "more Protestant" in its "sola scriptura" reliance on the isolated text object, while the legacy of Catholic hermeneutics—that divine meaning shows itself through an interpretative authority—is more palpable in postmodernism. This is a very convincing statement, which seems to make even more sense, I would like to add, if we think of postmodernism's fascination by the literatures of the Counter-Reformation in Europe.

Modernity came into being, Bókay explains in the next chapter, when people began to see the relations in the world around them not as transcendental but immanent. This change was launched in the Renaissance, came to full maturity with Cartesian philosophy and the Enlightenment, and was finally completed by the end of the 19th century. After having to come to terms with the Copernican and Darwinian revolutions, people were faced with the third (Freudian) narcissistic trauma, proving that the unconscious was a sphere that resisted human control. By the end of the 19th century the experience of language was objectified and the linguistic sphere came to be seen as an autonomous phenomenon. The discourse of modernity assigns legitimacy to the profane text; the hermeneutics of modernity is secularized. Spinoza, the "Descartes of hermeneutics," applied Cartesian rationality to being as a whole, and created a hermeneutics of immanence, whose job is to philologically reconstruct meaning in a transparent text. Modernity assigns a hermeneutic function to literary theory, which becomes a branch of hermeneutic cultural studies.

During the **premodern** period of modernity the program of the Enlightenment was comprehensively realized. The 19th century was the era of historicity, insisting on change being of the primary nature of "man," community, or language, and interested in forms of internal and external development, or *Bildung*. It was Schleiermacher who constructed the ultimate hermeneutics of modernity, and made its supposedly universal structure applicable to a variety of texts. He established the concept of the hermeneutic circle and assigned definitive status to dialogism in psychic and grammatical processes. Premodern hermeneutics, Bókay emphasizes, is based on a "reconstructive" principle: that by reconstructing the original context of the genesis of the text, the interpreter will be able to uncover immanent meanings deriving from the author. This historicism and contextualism characterize literary positivism, as well as *Geistesgeschichte* and the historical discourse of the Marxist approach too. The anthology is quite strong on positivism and *Geistesgeschichte*, selecting the representative writings of these schools, including their Hungarian representatives.

The second period of modernity, the **modern** age proper, started at the turn of the century. It demonstrated a conscious determination to "be modern" and "make it new," revolted against such principles as God, morals, and historicity, and saw World War I as the ultimate defeat of Enlightenment rationalism. The modern world ceased to be Eurocentric; the U.S. constitution

was seen as the model of modern society, while the metropolis was to be viewed as the symbolic locale of modern existence. The modern mind believed in the primacy of hidden forms and abstract structures, and learned from modern physics and psychoanalysis, among others, to privilege the unseen over the seen, the eternal over the contingent, depth over surface. Hermeneutic interpretation was valued as radical decontextualizing, as the uncovering, along some vertical axis, of internal meanings hidden under the text. Frege, Wittgenstein, Pierce, and Saussure mark out modern linguistics (and they all appear in the anthology too).

In spite of the fact that New Criticism get its full chapter later, there seems to be an imbalance between continental and Anglo-American materials, or the European and American context of modernity. The United States might deserve to be treated as the par excellence modern country, the "oldest" country in the world, as Gertrude Stein wittily remarked in *Wars I Have Seen*, the first country to enter into the twentieth century (as metonymy of the modern). In this context mention of Walt Whitman would have also been justified: as the first modern author, who fully fits Barthes's requirement of the abstract and multiple selves of the modern author.

Modern literature was then supposed to produce autonomous works, timeless masterpieces with stable textual meanings locked into language. Bókay explores modernist approaches to literature through Russian Formalism, New Criticism, and structuralism. **Russian Formalism**, the purest manifestation of modernism's literary theory, is treated here in its relation to the Russian avantgarde, especially Futurism. Exploring the immanent "literariness" of the literary text and analyzing literature into its component parts, Russian Formalism changed forever our conception of form, especially of poetic and narrative structures. The anthology is especially rich in conveying the variety of Russian Formalist writings.

New Criticism has, of course, made a similar difference in our understanding of literature (especially in the Anglo-American context) and has helped to create a set of tools and strategies, a systematic discourse, for the (close) reading of and talking about literature. At the same time, it has strengthened and naturalized our metaphysical emphases and primacies—such as metaphor (vs. metonymy); paradox, irony and ambiguity (vs. direct speech); figurative (vs. non-figurative) language; text (vs. context); poetry (vs. prose); literature (vs. science); spatial (vs. linear). Indeed, New Criticism is a par excellence modern approach to literature, emphasizing its vertical spatiality (instead of the horizontal temporality and historicism of the premodern positivistic approach).

In the United States literary criticism became professionalized during the New Criticism, when it grew into a respectable academic discipline and pedagogical method, fully equipped with strategies of *explication de texte*, capable of objectifying and spatializing literature into a verbal icon, a timeless and spatial complex. However, before its professionalization, it began as a fundamentally Arnoldian alternative to technocratic society, whose humanistic commitment New Criticism managed to retain. Matthew Arnold's legacy should be emphasized in this context, along with the idea of "literature as religion"

(185).

The third major modern approach to literature is **structuralism**, with its many national and ideological varieties: French, American, German, Italian, Soviet, and Hungarian structuralism, as well as Marxist structuralism, psychoanalytic structuralism, and poststructuralism. This grand international movement promised to offer a systematic interpretation of the text and the world as text, but was at the same time anti-hermeneuticist, seeking in every literary interpretation some general abstract model from the sphere of literary competence. Bókay discusses myth criticism, phenomenology, and semiotics as varieties of early structuralism, then deals with Jakobson in detail, especially with the well-known model of the functions of language, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of language and the axes of selection and combination. The next major section within the structuralism chapter discusses Barthes: his view on literature as connotative system and on the vertical-paradigmatic-syntagmatic relations of the literary sign. Finally, Bókay treats the nature of structuralist interpretation as it sets out to formulate the general linguistic form allowing for particular meanings. In general, structuralist interpretation has excelled in reading poetry primarily (Jakobson, Riffaterre, Pet(Efi)), while narratology has formulated a complex grammar of stories (Lodge, Barthes, Genette, Todorov, Uspensky), but has not produced a comparable set of tools for the interpretation of drama. The Bókay-Vilcsek anthology displays a formidable array of structuralist texts, both of its first (Ingarden, Jakobson, Frye, Lévi-Strauss) and second generation (Barthes, Genette, Kristeva, Riffaterre, Lodge).

I have a few minor and a couple of more substantial critical comments on the handbook's chapters on modernist approaches to literature. The latter concern a more plural conception of modernist literature and the rather short treatment of narratology in the structuralism chapter. Cutting across several fields of studies, narratology is international (Slavic, French, Anglo-American), structuralist (Barthes, Genette, Todorov), poststructuralist (Barthes, Genette, Prince) as well as postmodern (Barth, Hutcheon), with African-American (Henry Louis Gates) and feminist (DuPlessis, Schweickart, Lanser) contributors. But I would like to deal with the first point at greater length—, not because it affects the overall design of the book—actually, I think it is a minor misunderstanding—but because a more complex presentation of the relationship of modernist poetry to modernism (and postmodernism) might be relevant to other questions. The relationship of New Criticism to the Imagists (not "Imagists" [173], of course) is somewhat misunderstood when Imagism is considered to be the poetic "counterpart" of New Criticism, or its "context," as the anthology's subsection suggests. Instead, I would like to insist that Imagism, together with other forms of radical modernism, severely departed from High Modernist and thus New Critical ideals, and served as a "ground" for postmodern poetry.

Bókay correctly cites the Poundian dictum about the image being an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time, but fully identifies this kind of poetry with Eliot's metaphysical ideal. We must not forget that Imagism proclaimed its differences (epistemic differences, we might specify) from the

metaphysics of High Modernism. Where Yeats, Eliot, Auden, Stevens, and Frost—in line with Baudelaire and Mallarmé—opted for coherence, indirection, multiplicity of meanings, and a metaphysics of presence, the Imagist Pound, Williams, H.D., Amy Lowell or Richard Aldington—in line with Rimbaud and Stein (and later Beckett and Spicer)—proposed direct presentation and a return to the physical (not *metaphysical*) and literal. Where the Romantic-Symbolist dualism of High Modernism favored the metaphoric model, with coherent symbolic structure, figures of multiple symbolic associations, spatial form and the objective correlative ("symbolic embodiment of an emotional state"), the anti-symbolist "other" tradition of Pound, Williams, and Stein insisted that "a rose is a rose is a rose" (Stein) or that "No symbols where none needed" (Beckett). Imagist theory stressed horizontal processes: objective, concrete, particular, precise visual elements, combined by contiguity and association, along the metonymic model. Eliot's famous passage about how the poet's mind is equipped for "constantly amalgamating disparate experience" (qtd. in Bókay 175) is, for example, typical of New Criticism's vision but goes against all tenets of Imagism. Imagism was anti-High Modernist and would have been anti-New Critical too; in alliance with such master "grammarians" as Stein, it executed the paradigm shift of *radical modernism*—that non-symbolic and non-allegorical literary writing where "the meaning is not seated *behind* the words, but something revealing itself *in* the words" (Bernstein 145). This paradigm shift of radical modernism aligns it with poststructuralism and postmodernism; as Bernstein puts it, "in this sense poststructuralism can be understood . . . as a preliminary account of radical modernism, *après la lettre*." Indeed, with High Modernism and radical modernism, the plurality of modernisms seems to validate David Antin's *bon mot*: "From the Modernism you want, you get the postmodernism you deserve" (qtd. in Perloff, "Modernist Studies" 169). (On the two traditions of modernism see, for example, Perloff; on Imagism as one possible "ground" for postmodern poetry, see Altieri, Antin, and Bernstein.)

My minor problems with the modernism chapter basically concern missing figures whom I would consider more relevant. Bakhtin, for example, is painfully absent from the chapters on formalism and structuralism, even though his critique of formalism (that Russian Formalism divorced literature from the subjectivity of the reader and assigned a nonreferential function to language only) complemented Slavic formalism into a narratology and poetics still usable and influential today. In connection with New Criticism's privileging of verticality and spatiality, it would have been very important to bring in the influential work of Joseph Frank on spatial form in literature (see Frank). The Hungarian born John Lotz would certainly deserve to be mentioned among the practitioners of structuralist poetics: his work on the spatial structures of the sonnet and sonnet sequence, the spatial configurations of folk poetry, and metric typology was quite influential in the 1960s. I also think it would have been helpful to mention F. R. Leavis when discussing New Criticism's origins in England: because Leavis's practice of criticism and reading have become integral New Critical exercises, and because the "Leavisites" still seem to be around (see Eagleton 31) in Europe—and in Hungary, one might add.

In Hungary we seem to have a most eclectic situation, the dominant

approaches to literature being still those of modernity. High schools keep mass-producing students who believe the old positivist-formalist-structuralist consensus holds forever about literature, including that much "goes without saying," such as the distinctions between "literary" vs. "nonliterary," "high" vs. "popular" culture, or the basic "must read" list for an "educated person," that "meaning" is primarily rooted in authorial intention, thus the work itself, and it is the job of the critic / teacher—acting as an extension of the writer's will—to help readers / students "get" that meaning. Students are being taught the basic "skills" of reading in the form of positivist-formalist-structuralist methods of "analyzing" literary works. This so-called "analysis" implicitly favors figurative over realistic writing, indirect over direct expression, "deep" over surface meaning, form over content, structure over process, the elite over the popular, lyric over narrative poems, symbolism and psychology over plot and narrative. What students are not taught is how to read the traditional canon critically and develop an oppositional world-view. They are not taught to question existing paradigms of scholarly understanding. After such a "mistraining" it is nearly impossible in college and university to teach that paradigm shift—or, more accurately, those paradigm shifts—which have occurred in literary scholarship in the past twenty-five-thirty years.

For a long time, until the late 1960s perhaps, structuralism was in Eastern Europe considered a threat to Marxism. In 1966, for example, when Foucault visited Hungary, he saw structuralism as an alternative to Marxism and in Debrecen he rejoiced over the fact that the ideas of "good old Alth" [-usser] reached "the depths of the steppes" (see *Dits et écrits* 28). But by the end of the 1960s, Marxist aesthetics became exhausted in its hegemony, as Ernő Kulcsár Szabó aptly puts it (31), and structuralism became the theoretical framework for most of the original critical thinking. At the same time it managed to retain a rather ambiguous relationship to Marxism: it seemed to subscribe to and at the same time defy Marxism. The defiance consisted basically in ignoring the social strata and replacing it with language. In spite of this seeming defiance, however, structuralism revealed a fundamental kinship with Marxism and the political power it legitimized in Eastern Europe. Indeed, in its effort to find order everywhere, from kinship systems to poetic devices and forms, its insistence to locate knowable orders everywhere, structuralism fitted very well with Marxist orthodoxies; only here it was the linguistic and not the social that served as a vehicle of this order. The great Marxist metanarrative, which, as Ernő Kulcsár Szabó points out, infallibly assigned some trans-literary "essence," some social "ordering center" to literature (see 38, 39), was not subverted by structuralism but reinforced by it. The methodological conservatism of structuralism in Eastern and Central Europe can in this light be understood as the result of its ties with rationalism embedded in exactly those strategies of power and control which were later critiqued by poststructuralism.

Poststructuralism is actually treated rather briefly, in the very last section of the structuralism chapter. Here Bókay gives a helpful summary of Barthes's *SZ*, emphasizing the ways readings and misreadings point beyond the text toward subjectivity. He explains how poststructuralism replaces the possibility of a definitive meaning with an endlessly plural and creative process, and how it

differentiates between readerly and writerly texts. I would have been happy to read more about the transition from structuralism to poststructuralism, how yesterday's structuralists became today's poststructuralists, as Jonathan Culler puts it (25). What does Bókay think about the *post hoc ergo ultra hoc* nature of this transition: do succession and refutation indeed go together here? Does J. Hillis Miller's "canny" vs. "uncanny" distinction hold between the two movements? Perhaps it would have been good here to clarify this transition as a prelude to those others between poststructuralism and postmodernism, on the one hand, and poststructuralism and deconstruction, on the other.

In the next chapters Bókay deals with the intellectual background of postmodernism, treats postmodern hermeneutics and deconstruction in outstanding detail. First he gives an impressive overview of the main characteristics of postmodern thinking. In the era of postmodernity, or the **postmodern**, post-industrial society came to be characterized by an overwhelming domination of the service-sector and information control. Previously marginalized and non-integrated groups began to articulate their interests as social forces decentered and destabilized power structures. Bókay quotes Ihab Hassan's famous coinage, *indeterminance*, as best depicting the "essence" of postmodernism: final meaning is irrecoverable, ambiguity is unavoidable, continuity is unrealizable. The function of culture changes completely in post-industrial societies: neither does it serve *Bildung*, the integration of the individual into society through development, as it did in the premodern era, nor is culture the means of self-realization, as it was in the modern age. In postmodernity culture basically consists in technical and consumer strategies. Postmodern man is incredulous towards metanarratives, as Lyotard pointed out, whose *Postmodern Condition* marked the moment in 1979 when poststructuralist theory converged with postmodernism (or, when poststructuralism "changed names," as Rivkin and Ryan put it [352]). Instead of universal ideas or metanarratives, postmodernism grounds knowledge in heterogeneous mental strategies, and denies the possibility of any objective legitimation of knowledge. Language is much rather conceived of Wittgensteinean language games than some central structuring idea. Postmodernism also denies the possibility of the self—the Cartesian *cogito*—as a stable personal identity. Foucault, Bókay points out, detotalizes history and society and is mostly interested in the marginalized discourse of a decentered reality still controlled by various forms of power. Play, "playgarism," take an important role in postmodernism, as well as debris, of both language and the intellect, which previous structures refused to integrate. Bókay also treats Baudrillard's simulacrum concept as that which creates a new reality through desire, and where the model precedes the object itself. Postmodernism, Bókay quoting Lyotard in the section on language and postmodernism, does not accept the "solace of good forms," and thereby reinterprets the concept of the sublime; existence is primarily hermeneutic: an endless deferral of meanings without any final and absolute essence. Allegory, the textual realization of the sublime, gains

significance here. As opposed to the symbolic, allegory defies any totalizing discourse; instead, it gives another reading of an existing text, thus creating a Möbius strip of infinite textualities. Literary theory is also a form of allegorization: interpretation is not a metaphorical unearthing of "essence" but rather the allegorical assignment of new readings. Finally, at the end of this chapter Bókay deals with Nietzsche and Freud as the intellectual sources of postmodernism, and briefly discusses the relational model of meaning in postmodernism. As much as Nietzsche and Freud are basic departures for postmodern thinking, some other sources might also be mentioned, those which Charles Altieri, in an early but very influential essay, discusses as the conceptual frames of postmodernism: Husserl, Heidegger, and Whitehead (in addition to Nietzsche). Also, in the American context one should mention phenomenology, especially of Merleau Ponty, which has been quite influential in the United States.

There is one name missing in this very skillful treatment of the intellectual foundations of postmodernism: that of Charles Olson. For it was Olson who in 1950 first used the term *postmodern* in the sense we use it today: of an era succeeding and refuting Enlightenment rationalism as well as Western logocentrism. Olson was one of the most radical thinkers of the mid-century, extremely influential among the U.S. intellectual avantgarde. He denied the possibility of the self as stable identity ("self as ego"), questioned all possibilities of the transcendental signified or the metaphysics of presence, and distrusted mimesis for being both inaccurate and preventing participation. Opposed to the "Western tradition," he described, in a number of theoretical writings as well as his poetry, ways of succeeding logocentrism, rationalism, and representation in language. "Post-West" was his term for going beyond the "Greek" and the Enlightenment projects. In Olson's understanding, postmodernism was two-directional: both "post-" and "pre-" in its aspiration to return to a "pre-West" state in order to advance beyond the modern. Thus, the postmodern becomes "post-West" and "post-humanist" ("post-anthropocentric") via a descent into a "pre-West"—pre-rationalist and pre-symbolic—way of seeing and languaging from which the West had been cut off.

Postmodern hermeneutics, as a theoretical discourse countering the conceptual frameworks of the modern, Bókay insists, has discarded the possibility of ultimate and conclusive interpretations; instead, it consists of processes perpetuating discourse. He assigns the Copernican revolution in hermeneutics to Heidegger, who went beyond metaphysics and transcendental philosophy, and posited speech as the vehicle of self-reflexive existence, with language endlessly speaking. Gadamer's hermeneutic circle also denies the possibility of originality; everything is repetition, brought about by foreunderstanding and metaphorization as deconstructive rhetoricity. This metahermeneutic process turns into an endless *mise en abyme*. The reader response theories of the 1970s and Jauss's reception theory are discussed in this connection, both representing a paradigm break from structuralism and the definitive answers of modernism. (Hungarian literary criticism, we might add, had its difficulties accommodating the hermeneutic reception-aesthetic turn of Gadamer, Jauss, Habermas and others from the early 1980s. The insistence that

a piece of writing might become "literature" by and through reception, that meaning evolves through a dialogue between text and reader posed a threat to the critic or teacher trained in rigid orthodoxies, even though the text read as literary in terms of its relation to reader restored the asymmetry which existed in the Marxist communication model.) My only problem with this chapter is that little mention is made about the American hermeneutic schools, most importantly, the "destructive" and deconstructive hermeneutics of William Spanos, Richard Palmer, Gerald Bruns, and Richard Rorty. Also, reader-response theory might have deserved more attention, given its influence in the United States as well as its many links to other approaches like psychoanalytic and feminist theories.

Bókay's deconstruction chapters are admirably fastidious and canny, they are most lucid, and elegantly written. In the section on the philosophy of deconstruction Derrida is discussed in fine detail, as the philosopher challenging the foundations of metaphysical, logocentric thinking, the philosophy built upon the Cartesian *cogito*. While discarding the metaphysics of presence, meaning for Derrida is dispersed in the reader(s) rather than concentrated in the speaker or the text. Instead of ultimate truth, deconstruction offers ways for handling truths or meanings. The violent hierarchies of logocentric thinking give way to *différance*, a structural and temporal deferral of meanings, and endless supplements. All controlling centers being eliminated, play and *bricolage* become modes of decentered existence. The nature of Derridean trace is discussed as the object of deconstructive reading; writing as ultimate rhetoricity is treated from the position of the reader. Under deconstructive activity it would have been illustrative, I think, to bring in more examples of how the double gesture of deconstruction works through reversal and displacement of major hierarchical oppositions of Western thought. The examples offered by Nietzsche, Austin, Freud, and of course Derrida could have been cited to illustrate how the marginal and central terms are being reversed so that the oppositions themselves get displaced.

The chapter on the literary theory of deconstruction is another excellent piece. Bókay gives a full picture of American deconstruction without discussing each player, but focusing primarily on J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man. He describes how temporality became a central issue of poststructural theory, emphasizing such temporal changes of the spatial configurations of meaning as intertextuality, rhetoricity, allegorization, reading and misreading. Thus the most important experience of postmodernism is, Bókay suggests, that meaning is not located in stable semantic objects but in constantly changing semantic relations and events. Rhetoricity, a defining term for deconstructors, is thus basic as discipline, textual strategy, language practice, and mode of existence for language. In fact, rhetorization permeates not only language but the world too, textual meanings being projected onto things. As the logocentric opposition between ordinary and literary language is deconstructively reversed, literature becomes the par excellence vehicle of rhetoricity, provoking endless allegorizing chains of interpretation. Bókay articulates the deconstructive conclusion that we are all readers of the world, and our readings are never final (the valid readings are only a specific subgroup of the invalid interpretations

anyway), but always projections and assignments of meaning. Allegory thus becomes the paragon of rhetorical processes: the text allegorizes its meaning, while our interpretation allegorizes the text. Based on "The Rhetoric of Temporality" essay of de Man, who is considered the American counterpart of Derrida, Bókey outlines the difference between symbol and allegory, the latter allowing for temporality, playfulness, incoherence, intertextuality, and openness. The last section of this chapter deals with reading and interpretation in deconstruction. Readings and misreadings give out endless temporal chains, where the relationship between interpreter and the text is itself rhetoric. Bókey discusses the Borges short story, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertium," and a poem by Attila József to illustrate the allegorical nature of double rhetoricity in deconstructive reading. He also presents Ihab Hassan's readings of *Finnigan's Wake* and Borges's "Pierre Menand" story as instances of reception as allegorizing and deconstructing. In this chapter I think it would have been helpful to discuss the role of psychoanalysis and feminism in the development of deconstructive criticism; thus, for example, how Derrida's critique of Lacan set deconstruction apart from the larger movement of poststructuralism, or how such younger Lacanians as Barbara Johnson, Gayatri Spivak, and Shoshana Felman or such French feminist thinkers as Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva who have been influential in opening the field of feminist deconstruction.

To relate all this to Eastern Europe, one can say that Derrida's critique of logocentrism took decades to reach Hungary. Totalitarian systems being always "rational," logos always carrying the command of authority, they are founded on an instability and deficiency which must be controlled and concealed. The rigid orthodoxies dominant in our part of the world had difficulties tolerating diversity or pluralism, or that which challenged this order (the irrational, the nonsensical, free play). The madman, the criminal, the gay, the artistically deviant experimental writer, the political dissident were the very types whose idiosyncrasy rationalist procedures like structuralism and Marxism could not take into account; instead, they helped to marginalize and pathologize the figures of excessive violence, madness, erotics, sexuality. Even the postcommunist mind has problems dealing with figures of excess and criminality, which Foucault, Bataille, or Klossowski are fascinated with.

The very last chapter of this massive book discusses historicity and the place of literary histories in postmodernity. While during the premodern era the study of literature meant primarily the study of its history, development, or *Bildung*, and literary history remained dominant during the modern times too, in the postmodern period the historical study of literature became somewhat of an anachronism. Of course, literary histories are still being written both in Europe and the United States, but most often they examine the history of reception and canonization. Literary histories, I would like to add, came to serve significantly in the postmodern canon debate, whose most revealing case in point would be the American canon war. Unfortunately Bókey does not mention this canon debate or the anthology war going on in the United States, although its relevance to theoretical issues is quite obvious since it accounts, at least in part, for such new fields as New Americanist, feminist, African-American, or postcolonial theory.

It would have been good to deal with the problem of the canon at greater length for another reason too: because of the monumentalist attitude still prevalent in general literature education in Hungary. The teaching of literature still focuses on "high" culture around authors and orthodoxies, presenting the texts as great works whose value is *sui generis*—indeed, the Arnoldian tenet is fully respected that "the best that has been known and thought" is being taught, without encouraging the questioning of these timeless ideals. It is understandable, then, that middle and high schools produce students who learn quickly how to conform rather than challenge the established culture of power and authority. As "packaged" culture is transmitted to passive students, citizens are being reproduced who are passive rather than critical. The significance of poststructuralism, feminism, deconstruction, or postcolonial theory, if they trickle down to literature teaching at all, would lie exactly in the unlocking of the minds of students from safe hierarchies and mental structures.

The impressive Bibliography and the micro-attentive Name and Subject Index of the handbook complete this ambitious project.

Antal Bókey's handbook of modern and postmodern literary theories and its companion anthology, are bound to assume strategic importance in Hungarian literary theory. They will naturally become pillars of the canon of readings of persons educated in the humanities, and stimulate theoretical debates about literature, psychology, feminism, history, intellectual history, to name just a handful of related academic fields and disciplines. Both these publications have justly marked headline events in Hungary's intellectual life.

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