



Trans Balkan: Making the Public Space of Decanonization Cosy

Ottó Fenyvesi: *Reading Dead Poets from Vojvodina*

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Abstract. The poetic texts of Ottó Fenyvesi's volume, *Reading Dead Poets from Vojvodina* [*Halott vajdaságiakat olvasva*], explore how the traumatized, hysterical body becomes politicized, and how the space of poem becomes a *sensorium specificum*.

The dying and the mythologems of Great Serbia, the power of the dangerous tradition to create home, marking the Serbian state boundaries, the deads's loci, the new boundaries of cemeteries on border lines are confronted in Fenyvesi's volume with the principle of "we do not put alive on the dead" ["holtra elevent nem teszünk"]. Thus, in its activity of text construction it builds a multi-system canon endeavour and influences the specific space cutoffs of the poems' texts. In Jacques Rancière's formulation, they re-politicize the poem as a *sensorium specificum*, a specific detection. These poems designate their areas of activity in the splitting of representation and the sensible, in the oscillation between these regimes, and as sensible heterogeneous blocks; in spite of the narrative continuity of biographical summaries and the artists' **diaries** these poems oscillate between the linguistic element and raw presence, constantly playing with our sign reading capability. This dialectic of works, their way of being, the artistic practices link the "common" beyond the visible and thinkable regime, beyond the erosion of figurative subject's semiotics in order to reparcel the sensible again and again, to dismiss the holders of the speech again and again, and, respectively, suspend the symbolic and material constitutions that create the common as well as the forms of everyday experience of the sensible.

Keywords: *Sensorium specificum*, hysterical body, aesthetic regime, reconfiguration of a multi-system canon, poetic text

Although according to a statement by Guy Debord (1992) without historical consciousness (*sens historique*) we can easily be manipulated and thus no biographical truth can ever be assumed, let me quote an extract from the diary, restarted/continued and continuously published, by Ottó Fenyvesi, who moved from Yugoslavia to Veszprém in 1991. We can do so, since he himself also turns into poetry Géza Csáth's cultic diary as well as his good friend's, the painter Imre Sáfrány's diaries written in Paris. The entry is from 1998:

I'm reading dead poets from Vojvodina. I would like to write a cycle of poems ... They are all strange figures, forgotten or disinherited by almost everybody. (...) Of course, I would also include those whom I knew personally but died in the meantime: Ferenc Fehér, Feri Tóth, Jóska Podolszki, Jancsi Sziveri. The first poem has already been finished. (Fenyvesi/Orcsik 2009, 34)

The volume *Reading Dead Poets from Vojvodina* [*Halott vajdaságiakat olvasva*] was published more than ten years after this diary entry, however, the texts appearing later in the volume had been spread and published in various magazines. Through their presence the metaphoricity, uniquely experienced and bloodstained, of a minority existence in making (*devenir*) is constantly made visible. By their lines of escape they raise the Vojvodinian roots, the mulberry trees of the Great Plains into an imaginary space, reinforcing the dual context. Finally, the book appears with the tint-drawing of András Hangya on the cover – illustrating a “plundered” landscape providing a special, “sweltered” monochrome yellow background, making use of the previous working title [*Reading Dead Poets from Vojvodina*] and focusing on the loci of the dead, promising to be the first part of upcoming volumes.

However, this presence also testifies the centaur entity in Vojvodina, the modality of experiencing otherness/alterity coded as a Vojvodinian one.

Let me make a personal intermezzo. I have never seen Csáth's diary, treated as a cultic text, which Csáth perhaps wrote in the short period of abstinence in 1912–13 that he spent as a spa doctor, and which is about his morphine and trance dependence and about the ladies obtained in a considerable quantity. This diary may have broken several taboo-codes: the experiences related in the mimetic monotony, the programme of measurable delight, the experiment of “life optimum” offended the social views on drug usage/suicide. For me this diary, this hiding fetish as a subversive look showed the possibility of the line of escape from provincialism for the first time, when during every conversation in Vojvodina at least once the issue came up whether I had already seen the Csáth diary, in which hearts and plus signs are drawn as markers for the account of the female clientele. Then, in 1995, a volume appeared in Szeged, with the title *Pink Plaster* [*Rózsaszín*

flastrom], containing interviews with Vojvodinian writers. The idea which gave the title of the volume came from one of Ottó Tolnai's stories: instead of his permanent artistic programme, that of writing a Tisza-book, he began to write about a spa doctor. He came across Géza Csáth's diary, in which something was covered by a pink (flesh-coloured) plaster. And then, together with his master, István Domonkos, they often thought with a furtive horror that under the unremovable patch there might have been a secret that Csáth had discovered. That "beautiful horror" was formulated in Tolnai's book, in which each poem bears the title "árvacsáth." On the other hand Tolnai, in one of his stuttering, "sweet potato"-like conversations (*Poet Made of Lard [Költő disznózsírból]*), declares: "When I say gold nail, it is not the metaphor I see but I am horrified, because on the painting of Faragó, there, in Zagreb, I touched, I checked them" (Tolnai 2004, 67). Thus, the metaphors, the law of obtaining the motifs as well as the ideological inscriptions do not only serve as testimony or symptoms but are all empathy, performance, having many entrances and exits.

At Tolnai the response to the mystery behind this flesh-coloured patch is bleeding through the texts bearing the name "árvacsáth," while at Ottó Fenyvesi the traumatic response is the image of the worm gobbling the yellow humus of Bácska, engulfing the earth through the body of Nagyapáti Kukac Péter [Peter *Worm* Nagyapáti], or it can be found in the relations of his biographic and poetic texts: in the poetic programme, "action concentrate" of *poem into the vein* (quoted from the volume's first poem).

Tracking the "sweet potato" references, we should make a reference here to the relationship between Gilles Deleuze and music, since Deleuze claimed that once he would have liked to prepare a lecture the way Bob Dylan organized and created a song. In a previous volume of his, Ottó Fenyvesi hallmarks the third verse of his poem *Apparent Similitudes with Strawberries [Látszathasonlóságok földieperrel]* by Bob Dylan's song entitled *When the Dogs Run Free*. The mulberry-grafts deposited in the body of Bácska's plain, the yellow, amorphous forms of fried egg, the cloud fragments in this dog's life make the canon wriggle out of the terror of mimetic representation, thus creating a specific singular body which holds the promise of a new collective life – together with the endeavours of a multi-system canon. Along the nomadic image experience, in the acquisition of a nomadic metaphor experience, along the lines of escape from the dual context connected to the minority, in the rhizomatic text progression of further undeclinable bloody images, they draw the lines, the boundaries of the map in a way that the escape becomes an elopement as well. That is, it is the most active thing in the ideology par excellence, or, if you wish, in the contemplation of the spectacle. And this elopement (*fuite*) is never an elopement to the outside (*fuite hors-de*), while it creates a specific tension in the context of these endeavours. By initiating a dialogue, a community of dialogue, Fenyvesi writes the following in his

volume-opening poem: “You led me into literature, / and I will lead you out” (Fenyvesi 2009, 9). Instead of the apparent similitudes of pseudo-culture and pseudo-knowledge, instead of the overestimation of identities, in modeling the elimination of the dichotomy of the Hungarian-Serbian border, the metaphorization and the reconfiguration of the mobile canon and identity will result in every poem being an outburst, a harakiri, a crash, and also settling in the homeland. Thus, for example, thanks to the intense disorganization and dispersedness, Yugoslavness and, with this volume, Vojvodina become poetic *figures*, avoiding the language of the generalized separation of the totalitarian gesture (the redefined loci of the dead, the rearranged cemetery borders of the great Serbian state, the dream of Great Serbia). However, escape means suicide, too.

As an example, I have first chosen a poem from Fenyvesi’s volume entitled, before the edition in a volume, *Freely After Csáth* [*Csáth után szabadon*], although it unfortunately lost this title as well as its subtitle – *poem into the vein* [*vers a vénába*] –, which, by its mind-altering performative virtue, beyond the list of names of the volume, submitted the repeatedly designated common territory of the poems to a specific transliteration, together with the collective promise of a trip of specific perception.

The Csáth-text by Fenyvesi, just like every other text from *Reading Dead Poets from Vojvodina*, is accompanied by biographical notes (referring to Sándor Weöres’s *Three Sparrows with Six Eyes* [*Három veréb hat szemmel*]), characterizing in a few sentences the Vojvodinian artist placed in the focus of the conversation through dates, occupations, and special-arbitrary stresses. Thus, the data typologically seeming “little nothings,” hotch-potch [“gezemicék”], the facts of zones/areas of experience, their own outside begin to occupy the **own canon** as a common territory. The footnote accompanying the Csáth-text is somewhat lengthier than the other ones; moreover, within the text of the poem it is strategically repeated in the bordering verses of the poem that this is the first appearance of the circumstances of Csáth’s death. The repetition, the translocation, the hiding of the body, the total/totalitarian hiding of death and of the dead body, will be an act of lifting it to the level of the text. At the same time, it will be the act of escape too, which, instead of mimetic substitution, of the possession of representation, of the expansion of violent mythologems, will call forth the reconfiguration of public space. – I quote the note:

(...) On 11 September 1919, he escapes from the hospital, he wants to go to Budapest but Serbian soldiers arrest him at Kelebia, on the demarcation line. He takes pantopon in large quantities and dies. His body was taken back to Subotica in a peasant chariot covered by weed and grass. (Fenyvesi 2009, 14)

However, the failure of the attempt to escape at the demarcation line is resolved by the fact that a contemporary poet from Vojvodina, rejecting the

classification of metaphorization, helps to escape such clusters of the Csáth oeuvre which, with the method of the rhizomatic approach (as they call it, with their sweet potato-like mentality, or crying rootlessly) of the common terra, the humus of Bácska, resists the endeavours of the centralist work of canonization and contexts. At the same time, this is a sort of self-criticism of the earlier Fenyvesi poems.

However, the interception and getting through the demarcation line, the possibility of *trans* in the case of Csáth's oeuvre, the permanently fugitive text of the **diary**, generating dialogues from time to time and becoming verse, builds the Fenyvesi oeuvre in a similar way as Csáth makes the selection of his own, bath city female canon in the field of dating. Beyond the rule of pornographic nudity, the body-redundancy of the diary (while Fenyvesi also follows the exact history of the coitus and measurable fever), it is the text itself that answers the question hidden behind the pink plaster: by distending the similitude, the series of the singular bodies until the unbearable, the "law for obtaining motifs," the line of "receiving free line" and the omelette of the "Casanova breakfast" extracted from the rendezvous with the women reveal the lines of escape of such a text in which the multiple contexts and the rhizomorphic operation result in close reading, but the translocation takes place on several levels. The sometimes verbatim quotations of fragments of the diary, being present as intertexts, are enclosed among Fenyvesi's lines, so the **meeting** creates a common space, a specific sensation area of translocation. Instead of copying, instead of the juxtaposition of apparent similitudes and of the loci of the corpse, the encounter of Me with the Other, bypassing the terror of form, gets across ("Saving differently" – Kosztolányi).

While these texts reconfigure the literary field of canons and inspire new work on centralist canonization, they also refer to a map that we want to create with its sweet potato-likeness (Deleuze and Tolnai). Within a post-totalitarian discourse (in the diachrony of the dream of the national state of Great Serbia), the loci of the dead are not adjusted to the demarcation lines, forming other fake mythologems, instead, the texts exploit the bleeding of motifs, getting over intertextuality through the rhetoric of the war machine, and dragging the poem beyond the wounded war machine and finally, transferring through another rhetorical machinery, psychoanalysis and punk momism, the Balkan cradle. Thus, we are directed to two questions: how is meeting or dialogue possible in any kind of totalitarian narrative or mimetic display? Considering the category mermaids of thought (now of mainly artistic and cultural thought), no longer as temptation, how can we understand each other from "half-words," how is it possible to steal codes, then to spread them about, not as nomads but as bandits, guerillas?

Taking advantage of the dual context, the mulberry and strawberry snip a field from time to time (for example, the scene of becoming a poet, as part of the oeuvre), and thereby create the method of settling in a common area. It is this particular, confined sensation experience, the redistribution of the discernible that

moves and therefore mutually infects the apocryphal and aesthetical canons. “The mulberry-grafts settle / in our body, the dirt shows through the nail polish,” or “The city and the homeland are Via negative” [“Testünkben lerakódnak az / eperfaoltványok, a piszok átüt a körömlakkon,” “A város és a szülőföld via negatíva”] (Fenyvesi 2004, 66-67). These affirmations do not become lines of death, not even instead of corroding the lines of demarcation of history; they do not block the nomadic derivative, the ethics of which is to give up moving in order to experience the demands of an area until they become our blood.

Naturally, in this self-affirmation we can catch the way of speaking of the Ex Symposium period, which, instead of a centralist, essential canonization, is nourished by the art center of all nations of former Yugoslavia, moreover, it raises this tension at the level of ontology which counts with the discourse of the Yugoslav wars, that of the war machine, the violent breakup of the alliance, the violent collections of mythologems. However, during the continuous experience of converting and not lost in the demonic, it always lets itself be confronted with being disjointed by the Other, and annexing the principles of the impossibility of getting rid of alienation, it decentralizes the endeavours of canonization of Vojvodinian literature. According to Alpár Losoncz (2002), it avoids the encryption of metaphors, and the safety of ideology is contextualized as the mixture of the individual’s movement on micro-anarchical tracks. The dying and the mythologems of Great Serbia, the power of the dangerous tradition to create home, marking the Serbian state boundaries, the deads’s loci, the new boundaries of cemeteries on border lines are confronted in Fenyvesi’s volume with the principle “we do not put alive on dead” [“holtra elevent nem teszünk”]. Thus, in its activity of text construction it builds a multi-system canon endeavour and influences the specific space cutoffs of the poems’ texts.

Indeed, the closing of these poems into themselves does not support the narrative of the settled, despite the biographical summaries always preceding the poems, or the often arbitrary listing, or the poems do not become visible or thinkable in the discourse of the images of representation, but – in the formulation of Jacques Rancière – they re-politicize the poem as a *sensorium specificum*, a specific detection. These poems designate their areas of activity in the splitting of representation and the sensible, in the oscillation between these regimes; and as sensible heterogeneous blocks, in spite of the narrative continuity of biographical summaries and the artists’ **diaries** these poems oscillate between the linguistic element and raw presence, constantly playing with our sign reading capability. This dialectic of works, their way of being, the artistic practices link the ‘common’ beyond the visible and thinkable regime, beyond the erosion of figurative subject’s semiotics in order to reparcel the sensible again and again, to dismiss the holders of the speech again and again, and suspend respectively the symbolic and material constitutions that create the common as well as the forms of everyday experience

of the sensible. I quote Rancière: “The art is policy just by the fission (...) in the way it cuts, cuts off, disconnects people, the crowd and this time from this space” (Rancière 2004, 36-37). As a result, the practices and forms of art themselves intervene to reconfigure the sensible. Thus, in the very search of the sites of uncontrolled heterogeneity, beyond the law of the mimetic, this mechanism is reflected in the way of being of a literary work, and this sensorium specificum, this singular body cut out again and again in space and time – the poem in the vein or the cool body of Nagyapáti Kukac fed from the humus of Bácska – gets politicized, and this aesthetic regime incorporates its own independent area or practice in individual works of art, as well as the new forms of a collective life and their identification.

It makes all this in a way that, according to Fenyvesi’s diary, the earliest poem underlining the act of reading and thus the gesture of self-effacement reflects on that tone of Fenyvesi’s earlier volumes which imbue the strong textuality placed behind the cries of punk music, the democratic formalism, the ideological inscriptions with blasphemies: the first poem designates with its two starting lines the creation of a common consensus, the metapolitical status of the poem as a genre which disprove the space materially devoted to it: “I no longer know what and whom I can trust. / They do not give a damn to poems, poetry is in crisis” [“Már nem tudom miben és kiben bizzak. / Szarnak a versre, válságban a líra.”] (Fenyvesi 2009, 7). However, the common terrain is looking for its own legibility in the practices of art, and it treats the “commonplace,” instead of the terror of forms or the violent mythologems, by the act of smudging, by the smudging of forms to make them become amorphous. In this way the commonplace is interpreted as the locus of a new collective memory to be made public – in the metaphorical scheme of dying. We read in the opening poem: “I smudge the stars of the night, / the most beautiful clichés of literature. / Tuba mirum. The requiem refuels” [“Maszatom az éjnek csillagait, / a világirodalom legszebb közhelyeit. / Tuba mirum. Tankol a rekviem”] (Fenyvesi 2009, 9). Or in one of the long poems of the volume which initiates a dialogue with Péter Kukac Nagyapáti and with Imre Sáfrány and addresses his oeuvre that disappeared in *flaming images* (his paintings, representations had burned on an attic), and whose diary is also summoned, the commonplace and the metaphorization of dying, so the identity of anti-matter wins its presence in the heterogeneous sites, and its work creates dissensus which makes plastic the canon, thus also the collective, again and again: “Just load the luggage solemnly, bravely / The taxi arrives soon. / Sooner or later, everything becomes poor commonplace, / so let’s hear the diagnosis at last” [“Csak ünnepélyesen, bátran fölpackolni / a málhákat. A taxi mindjárt megérkezik. / Előbb-utóbb minden közhellyé silányul, / halljuk végre a diagnózist”] (Fenyvesi 2009, 130).

Thus, with the yellow background of the humus of Bácska, in the yellow summer of *Meridian Sweltering Savagery* [*Tikkasztó délköri vadság*], by the permanent reconfiguration of the canon, this volume of poetic texts summons the

bursting from the mother earth, and its symbolic implications, as the hysterical body drags another body again and again to itself, as the minority being will periodically return to the starting point of the trauma, to the hot spots of “running to waste,” as the discourse of biographies always suggests the occurrence of another tragedy at any time, and as – I quote from the poem at the end of the book before Fenyvesi locates himself at the end of the volume by his biographical portraits, and in which Bob Dylan’s protest songs are also evoked: “Navvy shovelling the yellow ground. Nimble as a worm. P. Nagyapáti. (...) Sometimes he closed his eyes and was gone far away (...)” [“Sárgaföldet lapátoló kubikos. Fürgén, mint a kukac. Nagyapáti Pé. [...] Néha lehunyta szemét és messze járt (...)”] (Fenyvesi 2009, 168).

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