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‘Transfers’ in Hungarian Literature from Vojvodina

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Abstract. The study examines the variants of the postmodern phenomena of literary ‘transfer’ (‘trans-correspondence,’ ‘transpass’) and their relationships with Hungarian literature (in Vojvodina) from the beginnings (the creative tradition of Kornél Szenteleky’s oeuvre) up to the events of present-time literary history (e.g., to the publication of *Esti* by Péter Esterházy). Referential aspects (the literary themes of the railway, the train, the change of trains), specific contexts (e.g., Kornél Esti as a contextual ‘transferring’ literary character) and metaphorical contents (e.g., the meanings of the straight line and the plane in the literature of the region) come into the focus of our research. Another significant aspect of the research is the interpretation of the intricate web of cross-cultural ‘transfers’ (between the works of Dezső Kosztolányi—Danilo Kiš—Péter Esterházy). The dominant motif of Central-Eastern European man’s experience of space is the straight line of the flatlands: lacking the sea-experience of the Southern European or of the more southern regions, as well as the related mythical experience of the world, infinity-experience, or reality perceptions hosting unrealities. The trip in this sense is an intermediate form of life: movement towards other shapes. The direction and extent of this movement has always been defined by the ‘straight line,’ the main road, and later the straight line of the railway.[1]

Keywords: Kornél Esti, straight line, transfer, trans-correspondence, travel, train, Hungarian literature, Hungarian literary representation in Vojvodina, Danilo Kiš’s oeuvre

Transfer, trans-correspondence, transpass

The term literary ‘transfer’ was borrowed from the study entitled *Esti Kornél „átszállásai” a vajdasági magyar irodalomban* [*Kornél Esti’s Transfers in Hungarian Literature in Vojvodina*] by Éva Hózsa (2009, 109–117). It is to be interpreted as

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a term denoting evolutionary connections of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina, 'transfers' of poetic phenomena from one literary work into another, and intertextual 'connections,' by which the *intermediate movements* of the given literature can be presented. It simultaneously shows concrete intertextual connections and metaphorical contents; it may describe one of the thematic planes and genre-creating variants of life form in regional Hungarian literature: a literary mesh woven from travel, (e)migration, leaving, roads/military ways/railways, (straight) lines and the lines created by sands; it is a border novel/history comprehensible as a travelogue/novel. 'Transfer' as a key expression in this case does not only convey such tropic implications as 'crosstalk', 'cross-correspondence,' 'transpass,' but also the referential aspects ('transfer' to another train line, to catch the other 'connection').

The 'transferring' passenger of Hungarian literature is Kornél Esti: "…he would always 'travel on,' more precisely, 'travel further,' from time to time, just from one vehicle to the other, crossing from one text into another" (Hózsa 2011, 71–72).[2] He is the epitome of the duality of leaving—returning, departure—arrival, flatland (Sárszeg, Porváros)—seaside (Fiume), straight—curved (still—dynamic). While in his own time Kornél Esti plays the role of the traveller withdrawing from the boredom of the motionless flatlands (but inevitably returning to his homeland), in the 1990s he becomes the alter ego of a fleeing, transborder, nostalgic character of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina. Hózsa connects this attitude to the 'elementary situation of discontinuity' (*ibid*): it refers to changes of countries, living space cut up by borders, broken life forms in the region. The reflected 'transfers' of Kornél Esti are well known to us: the novels *Esti Kornél utolsó hazalátogatása* [*Last Homecoming of Kornél Esti*] by Károly Dudás (1996, 164–166), *Után-utazás Esti Kornél fiumei gyorsán* [*Travelling on Kornél Esti's Track on the Fiume Express Train*] by Erzsébet Juhász (1998, 59–65), and two short stories about Esti in *Tükörcselek* [*Mirror Tricks*], a collection of short stories by Árpád Nagy Abonyi (2003) and his novel *Budapest, Retour* (2008) function as emblematic examples of intertextual 'transfers' and 'connections.' In 2010, our "Kornél Esti" 'transferred' to *Esti*, Péter Esterházy's work, and travelled on.

The visualization of the silhouette-like or referential attitude (metaphorical connections) of the Traveller can also be exemplified by several literary contexts and textual discourses: viewing their situation, the nostalgia towards the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and awareness of separation determined the lives of the travellers, i.e., the members of the Patarcsics family; the purpose of termination or 'alleviation' (Juhász 2001) of administrative/political borders on the one hand, and the psychological/mental separation, on the other, is served by travelling, 'riding on the tram' or 'taking the train,' as is done for a whole day by Angeline Nenadovics—riding on the tram around Novi Sad (*Egy villamos végállomást jelző csengetése* [*A Ring for the Final Tram Station*]), or as the members of the Patarcsics family

2 Quotations from Hungarian and Serbian literature were translated by the author.

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do, actually and symbolically travelling "from Graz to Subotica, from Szeged to the Isonzo valley, from Timişoara to Bratislava, from Novi Sad to Arad, back and forth, all around" *(Linzi Anziksz* [*Postcard from Linz*]*)* (Juhász 2001, 94). However, the Central European literary 'transfers' loosely contain Ildikó Lovas's latest novel written subsequent to the recent Yugoslav wars, entitled *Kijárat az Adriára* [*Access to the Adriatic*] (2005), in which although they do drive "through Bosnia… down to the coast" (Lovas 2005, 286), wallowing in the "sand from Bácska," "among the props of provincial environment" (*idem*, 199) is seen in contrast with the 'access' to the seaside, a 'transfer' into another kind of space; as well as 'changing' to the Fiume train by Kornél Esti in Dezső Kosztolányi's novel.

Literary discourses can be linked to the essay *Dezső Kosztolányi and Danilo Kiš* by Sava Babić—cited frequently—which discusses the possibilities of translating *Kornél Esti*. He explains the translation of Kornél Esti's name into Kornel Večernji (Vespertine) as a necessity: "Although names are not to be translated, I have nevertheless translated Kornél Esti's name since the Serbian reader does not understand what Esti means; therefore, if it gets published, the name will be Kornel Večernji." (Babić 2007, 164) Seen from the viewpoint of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina, it conveys more than just translating into another language: at the same time, what takes place is the 'takeover' of one of its most important metaphors and connotations into Serbian literature.

Sticking to the railway terminology and metaphors from the end of the 20th-century regional literature (e.g., Árpád Nagy Abonyi), literary 'transfers' are generally of 'round trip' character. In one of her studies (2009a) Éva Hózsa discusses the 'infiltration' of Danilo Kiš's prose-poetics into the novels of Péter Esterházy. A similar phenomenon can be documented—studying the textual discourse of Dezső Kosztolányi's *A szegény kisgyermek panaszai* [*The Poor Little Boy's Grievances*] (1910) and Danilo Kiš's short story-novel *Korai bánat* [*Early Sorrows*] (1971) (Milosevits 1998, 499)—in a 'comparative dictionary,' which has been done by Éva Hózsa (2009a, 112–117). Roland Orcsik (2004, 205) sees this as an archeological procedure and places the prose of Ottó Tolnai and Attila Balázs into the same discourse. Jutka Rudaš views several works by Danilo Kiš as pretexts to Esterházy's novels: thus, she examines the discourse (Rudaš 2008, 149–161) in the context of *Fövenyóra* [*Sand Glass*] (1972) and *Harmonia Cælestis* (2000), *Anatómiai lecke* [*Lessons in Anatomy*] (1978) and *Javított kiadás* [*Revised Edition*] (2000).

Straight line, railway, train

As known, the 'straight line' of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina was drawn by Kornél Szenteleky. "Soberness draws straight lines…"—he wrote in 1928, in his poem *Bácskai éjjel* [*Night in Bácska*]. In 1929, his novel *Isola Bella*—which

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was published posthumously (1944, 1993) in Vojvodina—Kornél Esti's preview is created in the character of Szabolcs, a decadent writer from Bácska, who flees from the "sluggish, passionless [...] land of joyless souls" (Szenteleky 1993, 187) to the world of Sicily's Beautiful Isle—as Kornél Esti does towards the 'vast' sea. Árpád Nagy Abonyi's Esti alter ego also returns home from his Western European travels to "the dusty town in Bácska" where "people already die many times during their lives" (Nagy Abonyi 2003, 91).

The dominant motif of Central Eastern European people's space experience is the straight line of the flatlands: lacking the sea-experience of the Southern European or even of the more southern regions, as well as the related mythical experience of the world, the infinity-experience, or the reality perceptions hosting unrealities. Travelling in this sense is an intermediate form of life: a movement towards other shapes. The direction and extent of this movement has always been defined by the 'straight line,' the main road, and later the straight line of the railway. The earlier horse-drawn vehicles were replaced by the train in 1825 (in Hungary in 1846). "Throughout the history of Central Eastern Europe, there have been trains running along, with or without any signs." (Bence 2008, 77) "As one who fell between the rails..."—says the frequently quoted line of the opening poem of the famous cycle (Dezső Kosztolányi: *A szegény kisgyermek panaszai/ The Poor Little Boy's Grievances*). (The well-known parody by Frigyes Karinthy: "As one who quietly stepped into it.") A manifestation of a similar regional experience is *Apámmal utazunk a vonaton* [*Travelling with Father on the Train*]:

> Apámmal utazunk a vonaton.
> Hideg, sugáros, éji nyugalom.
>
> A szunnyadó csöndesség lomha, mély,
> de ébredez, hallucinál az éj. (...)
>
> [*I'm travelling with Father on the train.*
> *Cold, beaming, nocturnal serenity.*
>
> *Dormant silence, sluggish, deep,*
> *but waking, the night's hallucinating.* (...)]

The dominant means of travel in Central Eastern Europe is the train. (Occasionally—in the oeuvres of Dezső Kosztolányi, Erzsébet Juhász, and István Szathmári—it is the tram but with a different meaning.) Among the emblematic literary examples (ranging from Sándor Petőfi's poem *Vasúton* [*By Rail*] written in 1847, through Orsolya Karafiáth's poem N*agypapa én és a keleti blokk* [*Granddad, Me and the Eastern Block*], up to the story *Veszteglő vonatok a sötétben* [*Stranded*

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trains in the dark] and *Bolond utazás* [*Mad trip*]) and among the numerous 'relations' to 'trips by train' in Erzsébet Juhász's *Határregény* [*Border novel*] I would like to underline the metaphoric final image, the scene when on the empty Vienna Express Gézi, Margit's "difficult-minded" son, unexpectedly starts running around in the corridor. According to the narrative comment: "… at that moment, several centuries' paths of motion emerge along the corridor of this train speeding to Vienna, reproducing the multitude of past roads by incredible velocity, so that all this could be passed on to the decay of irrepressible oblivion." (Juhász 2001, 94)

It is at this point that the "Kosztolányi–Kiš összehasonlító szótár" [Kosztolányi–Kiš Comparative Dictionary] by Éva Hózsa becomes very important:

> Kosztolányi uses the introductory motif also known from Karinthy's parody as the expression of intermediacy. The rails open up a perspective; however, they can also get entangled: the tangle of rails is Kiš's metaphor. It is a hidden central kernel, which can be uncoiled, and related to Ahasuerus's wandering. The parallel ceases as soon as the wanderer starts travelling. The father relates both to the train schedule as well as to chaotic disappearance. In Kosztolányi's volume, the poem beginning with the line *Apámmal utazunk a vonaton* [*I'm travelling with Father on the train*] attempts to capture the impressions intruding the nocturnal peace, sounds and fragments of images. (Hózsa 2009a, 116)

In Hózsa's article, the opposition of 'parallelism,' i.e. 'travel according to the schedule,' and the wandering (chaos) is emphasized as a particularly significant motif to understand the Kosztolányi–Kiš discourse.

Danilo Kiš's transfers into Hungarian literature (in Vojvodina)

In his interview bearing the title *Élet, irodalom* [*Life, Literature*], Danilo Kiš calls the father's (i.e. Eduard Sam's) *Menetrend* [*Schedule*] "a work of the Talmud" (Kiš 1994, 23) in the sense of explaining (existence). It was created by the symbolic necessity to bring order into the chaos of straight lines (roads, rail tracks) enmeshing the space (of existence) of Central Eastern Europe—an experiment to see through this space cut up by straight lines. A quote from the interview: "His work, *Vasúti-, társasgépkocsi-, hajó- és repülőgépjáratok Menetrendje* [*Schedule of trains, buses, ships and airplanes*] became renown owing to my books." (Kiš 1994, 26) The same is mentioned in *Kert, hamu* [*Garden, Ash*] as "apocrypha, a sacral Bible," with a concrete reference to how to 'correct' and 'restore': in

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Schedule, the distances and separations between different places of the world become of 'the size of a human step.' (Kiš 2004, 38 [1965], [1967: in Hungarian])

As mentioned before, the history of the region is crisscrossed by trains with or without signs. The aim of Eduard Sam's order/schedule-creating act is to produce a state of transparency accomplished by marking these. Instead of the chaos caused by the lack of a schedule there arises the necessity to restore order:

> After several unsuccessful businesses, my father got a position at the Railway Ministry where he made it all the way to the general inspectorate. Owing to this, the whole family travelled first-class for free until 1992, and the ticket collectors saluted my father like a general. (*ibid.*)

It is exactly this that seems to be the greatest paradox in the father's life: instead of the trains (roads) that he named and marked, he disappeared on an unscheduled train. Instead of the Schedule symbolizing order, absence is what interprets his existence in literature: "The scenes in which my father appears are a type of negatives: the prints of his Absence. Up to the present day, I still see him getting into a car, a carriage, boarding a train, or a tram. We are constantly expecting and seeing him off." (*idem*, 20)

Departure and arrival

In the presented space of existence, the experience of departure and arrival is a significant, notable moment in life thanks to which the notion of *station* also becomes a topic in art, moreover, in everyday life it gets an additional sacral meaning: 'the stations of human life.' Among its manifestations in literature, I would mention the scene when Pacsirta is leaving, and her parents are seeing her off to the station. Or the images from Árpád Nagy Abonyi's *Budapest, Retour,* which are created in Kornél Esti's mind when after a long time spent in emigration—now coming home for a funeral—his train pulls into the station. In the second short story on Kornél Esti, *Mirror Tricks*, the narrative comment summarizes the regional way of life: "The moment he spotted the worn railway station, melancholy came over him. He stopped in the deserted corridor of the station: he idly browsed through the ragged schedule, as if he was about to travel on." (Nagy Abonyi 2003, 91)

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How Eduard M. Kiš as a 'railway inspector' made it into literature

Subsequent to literary transfers, transpasses and connections having been interpreted above, the way it is due and according to schedule, I wonder whether it is possible and necessary to answer the question posed. The model of family history, i.e. the encyclopedic work, which functions in Danilo Kiš's oeuvre as a genre-creating mode, brings up moments analogous to the poetic of questioning the past historical narrative 'of present interest.' The essence is the possibility of crisis modeling, projections of personal destinies into the past; the interpretation of a personal biography in the past. Danilo Kiš cannot be envisaged otherwise but as a traveller, on the train.

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