

Human and Nonhuman Animals in Sándor Márai's *Peace in Ithaca*

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Abstract. This paper on Sándor Márai's 1952 novel *Béke Ithakában* [Peace in Ithaca] centres on the political zoology of the Third Book. It shows that in this case Márai questions the nature of man and the difference between man and animal more sharply than in his earlier works—not independently of his experiences of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century and WW II. In the novel, the ancient bucolic tradition is the vehicle for these issues, which also correspond to contemporary developments in European thought.

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In Sándor Márai's *Peace in Ithaca*, a novel published in 1952,¹ Odysseus (Ulysses) is presented in the narration of three characters. Penelope, Telemachus, and Telegonus tell us what they know about Ulysses and how their lives intersected. This time, I will take a closer look at the political zoology of the novel's *Third Book*, the story of Telegonus. The focus will be on the human–animal distinction in the Telegonus discourse, on the uncertainties, the folds, the blurred parts of the line separating man and animal. This political zoology unfolds among the people changed into pigs on the island of Circe the enchantress. These human and nonhuman animals appear as part of the bucolic environment in the *Third Book*. Herding them and observing their behaviour on the island of Aeaea is the main activity of Telegonus, the narrator-protagonist of the *Third Book*. The choice of topic is inspired by developments in literary animal studies, more specifically, in the field of zoopoetics.² This approach tries to

1 This study was supported by the research project NKFIH 128492 and NKFIH 132113.

2 Borgards, "Tiere und Literatur" provides a reliable overview of literary animal studies and the differences between their methods. Among them, Kári Driscoll's zoopoetics seems to be the most methodologically sophisticated and productive. For an introduction to this, see: Driscoll and Hoffmann, "Introduction."

consider animals in literary texts in their own right, not merely as allegorical figures endowed with human qualities. Kári Driscoll and Eva Hoffmann give the following justification:

“As our understanding of animal language, culture, and morality develops [...], so must our view of the nature of the human and the humanities. This is a further reason why a zoopoetic intervention into literary studies may be necessary, as the traditional insistence on reading literary animals as metaphors and allegories for the human has not only served to occlude the complexity and material-semiotic recalcitrance of these nonhuman presences, subsuming the diversity of literary animals under the singularity of “the animal,” it has *also* tended to assume a singular and universal human experience or condition that would be self-evidently represented by the former.”³

In Márai’s novel, animals are not the disguised bearers of known human qualities, but their textual representation adds something relevant to the way we think about human and nonhuman animals. This time, Márai asks more incisively than in his earlier works—clearly influenced by the experience of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes and World War II—about the nature of humanity and, as part of this, the difference between humans and animals. It is precisely these timely themes—which are in line with contemporary developments in European intellectual history—that are addressed in the novel, with the ancient bucolic tradition serving as a vehicle for them.

Issues of zoopoetics seem to have received little attention in readings of *Peace in Ithaca*. I have found only one formulation that attempts, in its own way, to take stock of the human-animal relationship by addressing its appearance in the novel. Huba Lőrinczy argues as follows:

“The prerequisite for becoming a self-determined adult personality is, in part, to break away from the gods and, in part, to tame the animal within with the power of reason. (Circe punishes those who arrive on her island by turning them into pigs, birds, and sea monsters, thereby absolutizing the animalic aspect of human nature.)”⁴

This phrasing makes it clear that here, too, there is no horizon for exploring human-animal relationships in all their complexity and contradictions. In the traditional humanist view, animals embody the instinctive realm of humans—autonomous,

3 Driscoll and Hoffmann, “Introduction,” 5–6.

4 Lőrinczy, “...személyiségnek lenni a legtöbb, amire ember képes,” 954.

rational beings who must subjugate that realm.⁵ The title of Lőrinczy's study suggests that "Being a Personality is the Most a Human Being Can Be". This interpretation sees the celebration of the European, Faustian personality at the heart of the novel. A more nuanced approach is taken by those who see in *Peace in Ithaca* the failure of the modern program of self-creation, its impossibility in the new era,⁶ or indeed an example of the changeability and inscrutability of the personality.⁷

The first chapters of the *Third Book* are set on Circe's island of Aeaea, and the action is set in Telegonus's childhood and early youth, not specified in detail. Telegonus, the first-person narrator, recalls events in a retrospective narrative after the death of Ulysses, but he is not always a completely reliable narrator. The space and time evoked are emphatically and repeatedly encoded in literary terms. On the one hand, the shaping of the narrative's temporal relationships is striking: the summary narrative leaves the exact temporal relationships unclear but often refers to the repetitive nature of the actions, and its pace is perceived as slow; thus the first two chapters represent a kind of mythical timelessness. On the other hand, the novel's depiction of the island refers to Homer's description of Circe's island and, at certain key points, to the plot elements of the episode in Book X of the *Odyssey*, while we are essentially in a bucolic setting, that is, in the milieu of the *locus amoenus topos*. Even at the time when pastoral poetry was born, the genre was not based on a mimetic representation of the natural and cultural environment, but on its fictional interpretation.⁸

Surprisingly, the novel's bucolic intertextual connection has not been addressed by scholarship, although the presence of pastoral motifs is immediately striking. The island of Aeaea is rich in water, has fertile, sun-drenched soil that yields abundant crops, and its lush, shady forests "dropped their berries and acorns in abundance."⁹ The elements of water and light, which define the description of the island, are given a mythical explanation: they are provided by Oceanus and Helios, the great-grand-

5 See also Rónay, *Márai Sándor*, 487, who approaches the novel less from the perspective of the Enlightenment tradition than from that of man's distinguished nature as a creature.

6 Szegedy-Maszák, *Márai Sándor*, 144; Gintli, "A távollévő jelenléte," 208–9.

7 Fodor, "Ithaka idillje..." 344; Polgár, "»Megfoghatatlan, mint a tenger«," 147–53; Lőrinczy also makes somewhat contradictory statements pointing in this direction (e.g., "... személyiségnek lenni a legtöbb, amire ember képes," 953).

8 See Ernst Robert Curtius' overview of this (entitled "Die Ideallandschaft") in *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, especially 193 and 195, but the entire process of the development into a *topos* is interesting: 189–207. Wolfgang Iser, on the other hand, cites the tradition of pastoral poetry as a paradigmatic example for the anthropological explanation of fictionality, see *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, Chapters Two and Three.

9 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 157. Quotations are my own translations. The novel has not yet been translated into English.

father and grandfather of Telegonus. The child shepherd, again in keeping with his ancient poetic ancestors, has plenty of time to play and make music, as well as to observe the behaviour of his pigs. However, this idyllic setting is surrounded by a threatening environment (this threat has its ancient counterpart in Virgil's *Eclogues*,¹⁰ as well as its twentieth-century counterpart: this aspect was revived in Miklós Radnóti's eclogues composed not long before Márai's novel). Aeaea is also called Death Island (the name of the island inevitably evokes lamentation ('Ajjajaj') for Hungarian readers) because it is "only a day's walk away" from Hades, the realm of death.¹¹ The island's reputation is not helped by the fact that those who arrive here and do not end up in the underworld end up in the pigsty: Circe, the sorceress who rules the island, turns them into pigs, as we also know from Homer's account. In any case, according to Telegonus' description, his days on the island were marked by the enjoyment of life, freedom, play, and the friendly company of pigs and, above all, by the absence of fear.¹²

While the first chapters of the *Third Book* are closely linked to the *topoi* of the bucolic tradition in terms of the natural and cultural environment, material props, characterization, and certain plot elements, it is worth taking a look at those which, through anachronisms, clearly link the narrative world to events in twentieth-century history and the issues raised. After the bucolic chapters, in a sharp cut, Circe and Hermes, who is a guest on the island, have a long conversation, the anachronistic lesson of which is that the political-historical-philosophical program of Logos (actually, the program of modernity, of Enlightenment, and the globalized progress of capitalism) unfolds. Humans have become autonomous, which also means that they have turned away from the gods and the world order they guarantee. This cultural and historico-philosophical explanation put forward by Hermes is then linked to the (again anachronistic) traces of the historical experience of totalitarian regimes in the twentieth century. In the novel, this takes a concrete form, most of all, in the totalitarian state of Sparta, where Telegonus arrives after leaving his mother's island (Chapter XI). The totalitarian Sparta is characterized by the rule of the repressive Order: uniformed officials are everywhere, borders are closed, and the secret police, in general, the surveillance power, is everywhere. The novel's critical and biopolitical discourse also includes the practice of eugenics in Sparta. This takes the form of the systematic killing of disabled new-borns, the justification for which is "to unify and standardize the average quality of human material"—as an official explains the practice to Telegonus.¹³ It is also significant that in the *Third*

10 For example, at the beginning of *Eclogues I* and *IX*.

11 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 158.

12 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 158, 160.

13 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 225.

Book, in Chapter IV, when Circe turns her new victims into pigs, this transformation is clearly to be understood as their violent exclusion from humanity, making them outcasts deprived of their humanity. This is nothing less than Circe's unscrupulous manipulation with "the possibilities of human and animal breeding."¹⁴ It is important that this is not simply a matter of power manifested at the individual level (as in Homer), but it is specifically the biopolitical transformation of human beings. Márai's novel opens up a dimension which extends from Nietzsche to Sloterdijk and contemporary transhuman and posthuman thinking. In Hungarian literature, the theme remains largely absent until it re-emerges in the von der Schuer thread of Péter Nádas's *Parallel Stories*.¹⁵

By dehumanization and animalization, biopolitical violence appears in the world of the novel, which the contemporary Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben in *The Open* associates with the practices of concentration camps and identifies as a consequence of the operation of the modern anthropological machine,¹⁶ i.e., the "excluding as not (yet) human an already human being, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human."¹⁷ These twentieth-century experiences and issues underlie the questions to be addressed below.¹⁸

According to Telegonus, his powerful mother makes him guard pigs for the biopolitical and pedagogical purpose of teaching him about "the animal nature of man."¹⁹ The statement is an ex-post interpretation of the retrospective narrator, but even as such it is not without a certain ambiguity and tension. As the pigs herded by Telegonus are transformed from humans, they can provide an experience of the human in animals as much as the animal in humans. This ambiguity and the resulting uncertainty ultimately derive from the fact that—to cite again a key lesson from

14 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 195.

15 There is no space here to go into detail; for context, see Kulcsár-Szabó, *A gondolkodás háborúi*, 118–52; on Péter Nádas: 118–24; on the conceptual history of eugenics in twentieth-century Hungary, see Kakuk and Sándor, "Mapping the postwar legacies of eugenics in socialist countries."

16 Agamben, *The Open*, 22.

17 Agamben, *The Open*, 37.

18 Cp. e.g. Ritoók, *Homéros Magyarországon*, 286–88, on the presence of the "experience of the 20th century" in the work; Gintli, "A távollévő jelenléte," 209, the coming of collectivism and the "era of the masses" in the world of the novel. It is surprising, on the contrary, that István Fried, while identifying the influences of the novel's 20th-century literary context on the text in the most comprehensive and accurate manner (from Thomas Mann to James Joyce), denies the presence (even if only traceable) of the historical world of the century in the work: "There can be no mention (yet) of the totalitarian dangers of the world era following Ulysses." Fried, "»Az ő kedves szava Logosz volt – az értelem«,," 207.

19 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 158.

Agamben's *The Open*—the establishment of a caesura between humans and animals is both necessary for human self-definition and a clearly performative, that is, political act. The human-animal difference is both necessarily assumed as preexistent and created ad hoc in the act of differentiation.²⁰ Moreover, the novel presents a constant interchange between the two poles—human and animal—which shape the European understanding of man through their rigorous juxtaposition.

“I was afraid of men. I was afraid of what was animal in them. And now that I know more about this strange species, I am mostly afraid of what is human in them.”²¹

This is vividly shown in the most detailed description of the pigs' behaviour, where the human-animal difference is openly thematized. In this section, the pigs appear as Telegonus' “friendly” “playmates,” and we learn that “[t]heir love life was as uncomplicated as their social life.” “I don't remember a sad pig,” adds Telegonus.²² Pigs live a friendly, sociable, playful, happy (or at least balanced and calm) and uncomplicated life, in which feeding the body plays a dominant, if not exclusive, role.²³ This is contrasted with the lives of humans, as pigs “[did] not fight wars as before, when bipedal life took them into dangerous and painful adventures.”²⁴ Human life here is associated with war, a highly social (but not exclusively human) form of aggression traditionally associated with animals. The animal and aggression are frequently connected not only in everyday thinking, but also in the humanist-emancipatory vision of man freeing himself from his animal instincts through civilisation and taming himself by his own efforts. In fact, both animal and human aggression have an evolutionary root, i.e., an adaptive function (control over potentially always limited resources in nature).²⁵ If Telegonus' pigs are not aggressive, the only reason must be that the ideal natural environment and human care provide them with abundant resources where they do not need competition. Márai systematically reverses the conventional notions of aggression associated with animals and humans. The mother's warning to the boy setting out on his journey is along the same lines as the above quote:

“You need to get to know the other country, the world of the people. It is useless to continue to guard the pigs [...] You are leaving the divine world. In the future you will live among humans. You will need a weapon.”²⁶

20 Agamben, *The Open*, 16.

21 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 157.

22 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 159.

23 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 158.

24 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 159.

25 Krupp, “*Evolution, Biology, and Aggression*.”

26 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 222.

Here, the armed human world is contrasted with both the divine and the animal worlds. The Arcadian topos undergoes a similar reinterpretation: The gentle nature of the wild animals on the island and the “Arcadian harmony” between domestic and wild animals is given new meaning, again, primarily by contrasting this peace with the fearful human world, perceived by Telegonus in himself:

“Pigs and wild animals roamed the meadows of our island together in Arcadian harmony. It was a life without fear... As a child, I never knew that it was possible to be afraid of living creatures. I learned about fear later—later, when I came to know the human in myself.”²⁷

As quoted above, the phrase “dangerous and painful adventures” refers to human life and behaviour, contrasted to animal life.²⁸ It can, of course, be understood as applying not only to war but to activity in general, to incessant acting, creating, and intervening in the processes of nature or in the events of history, in the course of the world in general—in all danger and pain of these unpredictable “adventures”. At an earlier point in the novel, Calypso explicitly associates adventure with the human, at least she explains Ulysses’ character from adventure, more specifically by linking adventure and finitude: “He went to the adventure, the final form of which is death, he said quietly. —That’s why he was human....”²⁹ Later, in the conversation between Hermes and Circe, adventure is explicitly linked to change and transformation in the framework of one’s destiny.³⁰ Telemachus also understands his father’s humanity from this: “Among my father’s human qualities, many are less than appealing. Certainly, he was curious, greedy, covetous, and hungry for prey.”³¹ This is what Ulysses himself says: “‘there is much madness in gods and men. They don’t know exactly what they want... They want action, they want change,’ he said sadly.”³² On a more abstract level, this restlessness, this activity, this will to change the world can also be understood as the manifestation of ‘aggression’—the obsessive world-creating and world-destroying activity of man (or is it only Western man? Or only modern Western man?).³³

27 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 160.

28 In the sentence quoted above: pigs “[did] not bear wars as before, when bipedal life took them into dangerous and painful adventures” (p. 159).

29 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 150.

30 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 192

31 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 85.

32 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 40.

33 For this, see Martin Heidegger’s thoughts from 1935 on the existence of “the uncanniest of the uncanny” (p. 159), that is, man as a “violent” being (which is not a moral but an ontological category here), who constantly breaks new ground in existence, in contrast to the animal, which “remains in its own single route” (165). Heidegger explains these ideas in his interpretation of

The last sentence of the paragraph on the behaviour of pigs states the following about Telegonus' animals: "All in all, I have experienced nothing but a grunting satisfaction when I was with them."³⁴ [Mindenestől, nem tapasztaltam mást környezetükben, mint rőfögő elégedettséget]. A puzzling sentence, especially as regards the modality of the utterance, i.e., its relation to the truth of what is said. For, on the one hand, it is possible to assign to it an evaluative perspective that shows "grunting satisfaction [rőfögő elégedettség]" as the mere stupidity of the *alogon* animal unable to think and speak, wallowing in mud, from a top-down anthropocentric-humanist perspective.³⁵ Or, on the contrary, the statement can be read as a mere factual statement, giving no devaluation, moreover even as a positive assessment—especially after the just quoted preceding sentence, which mentions the conflicts of aggressive, restless human life. It seems impossible to decide between the two interpretations.

This ambiguity—the ambiguity concerning the values embedded in the human–animal juxtaposition—is further complicated by the multiple intertextual connections between the final sentence quoted concerning the pigs' "grunting satisfaction," and both the classical tradition and the novel's recent past.

In questioning (not overturning!) the usual hierarchy, Márai could also draw on classical models. For this, it is worth recalling two older texts that are also related to the adventures of Odysseus and Circe. In one of Plutarch's texts ("Whether Beasts Are Rational," *Bruta animalia ratione uti*), one of the Greeks turned into pigs explains to Odysseus that it is rather strange that the king of Ithaca wants to persuade them to leave behind their current life, which is full of all kinds of good things, and the one who provides them with these things (namely Circe), and sail away with Odysseus, "having become once again human beings, those most hard-pressed and ill-fated of creatures" (986e1–2; trans. Stephen T. Newmyer, modified). Odysseus' transformed companions, at least according to Gryllus, who is speaking here, would choose to remain in animal form rather than return to human form. It cannot be ruled out that Márai was familiar with Plutarch's work, although it is not particularly likely. (However, through Rousseau, Márai may have been familiar with this reference: in Part 1, Chapter 2 of *The Social Contract* [*Du Contrat Social*], citing Plutarch, Rousseau mentions Odysseus' companions.)

It is more likely, however, that Márai was familiar with Jean de La Fontaine's tale "The Companions of Ulysses" (*Les Compagnons d'Ulysse*), which can be regarded

Sophocles' *Antigone*, First Chorus.

34 Márai, *Béke Ithakában*, 159.

35 The Hungarian word 'rőfögő' refers even more clearly and exclusively to the sound made by pigs than the English word grunt (which has the same primary meaning but can also be used to refer to human sounds such as groaning and grumbling).

as a dramatized and pointed rewriting of Plutarch's text.³⁶ When asked, the lion, the bear, and the wolf of the fable would all rather remain animals and do not wish to return back into human form.³⁷ The wolf's response is particularly interesting:

"I don't see your point. You come here treating me as though I were a carnivorous beast. But what are you, who are talking in this strain? Would not you and yours have eaten these sheep, which all the village is deploring, if I had not? Now say, on your oath, do you really think I should have loved slaughter any less if I had remained a man? For a mere word, you men are at times ready to strangle each other. Are you not, therefore, as wolves one to another? (*Ne vous êtes-vous pas l'un à l'autre des loups?*)."³⁸

It is easy to see that this replica refers mainly to Hobbes as part of the long (stretching from Plautus to Jacques Derrida) and by no means uniform line of thought in the history of the idea known as *homo homini lupus*.³⁹ The wolf's response thus takes on strong (bio- and zoo-) political overtones, particularly in relation to the themes of 'violence,' 'war,' and 'killing,' that play a key role in Márai's text.

As for contemporary references, let me first give two examples without going into detail, both from interwar Hungarian poetry. First, section 11 of Attila József's *Eszmélet* [*Consciousness*, 1933/1934], which has a clear connection to Márai's text:

"I have myself seen happiness,
soft it was, blond and three hundredweight.
Its curly smile was tottering
On the strict grass of the yard.

36 Nor can we be certain, of course, that Márai was familiar with this text. In any case, Márai was a member of the Hungarian La Fontaine Society, and it was within the framework of this society that Béla Vikár published his 'complete' translation of La Fontaine in 1922 (although it did not include the Preface, the Foreword, or the text entitled *The Life of Aesop*). In addition, from another perspective that gives pause for thought, in the interwar period and even later, the most prominent Hungarian writers translated La Fontaine's fables, from Dezső Kosztolányi to Lőrinc Szabó, Miklós Radnóti, and later Ágnes Nemes Nagy and László Kálnoky. La Fontaine was extremely popular at the time, and Márai, as a member of the Society and an author familiar with French culture, probably read extensively the seventeenth-century master's works.

37 One might ask whether Ulysses would have received the same answer if he had asked his companion, who had been transformed into a pig (an animal lower than those listed above). Beyond the fact that the questioner uses rather harsh, even derogatory words to describe the bear and the wolf, the point of the text is to question the distinction between animals and humans, or more precisely, the hierarchical opposition between them, and this would equally apply to pigs.

38 Translated by F. C. Tilney.

39 See: Derrida, *The Beast and The Sovereign*, where the political and zooanthropological theme of *homo homini lupus* is one of the main motifs of the first four seminars (9–135); for an interpretation of the saying in Hobbes, see mainly: 58–62.

It settled into the soft warm puddle,
 blinked, and gave a grunt at me –
 to this day I see how hesitantly
 the sunlight toyed amongst its downy hairs.”⁴⁰

Second, two lines from Gyula Juhász’s 1919 poem *Falusi delelő* [Village Noon], also can come to mind:

“Pigs lie wallowing in warm mud,
 Oh, the animals’ deep, happy melancholy!”⁴¹

Next, let me refer to the surprising conceptual parallels extended to individual motifs that can be drawn between Márai’s novel and certain passages of Alexandre Kojève’s famous *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, lectures given in Paris in 1933–1939. The French author highlights the following points from Hegel’s reasoning on the ‘human’ (or, in Kojève’s reading, animal) existence that remains after the so-called ‘end of history’.

1. This end (of history, i.e., end of humans) is not a biological catastrophe at all, but rather the restoration of harmony between man (now as a ‘posthuman’ or ‘animal’ being) and nature (compare with what we read in Márai about “Arcadian harmony” and Telegonus’ peaceful and harmonious life with animals).
2. For Kojève, the end of history means first and foremost the end of *action* linked to man as a free and historically *acting* individual—it means, above all, the disappearance of wars and violent revolutions (recall Márai’s emphasis on wars and action for change as inherently human characteristics).
3. And what remains, not being history, can be preserved indefinitely; these are, according to Kojève, “art, love, play, etc., etc.; in short, everything that makes Man happy.”⁴² (In this regard, the pigs’ “grunting satisfaction” in Márai’s novel,

40 Translated by Michael Beever.

Láttam a boldogságot én,
 lány volt, szőke és másfél mázsa.
 Az udvar szigorú gyöpén
 imbolygott göndör mosolygása.
 Ledőlt a puha, langy tócsába,
 hunyorgott, rőffent még felém –
 ma is látom, mily tétovázva
 babrált pihéi közt a fény.

This strange pig, which oscillates between the idyllic and repulsive, is quite different from, say, the title character “the boar-headed Lord” in Endre Ady’s poem *Harc a nagyúrral* [Battle with the Lord].

41 Disznók hevernek meleg sárba túrva,
 Ó állatok mély, boldog mélabúja!

42 Agamben, *The Open*, 6; Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 158–59.

the “uncomplicated” nature of “their love life”, and the games and music of Telegonus, who lives among them as their “friendly” “playmate”, appear to be close parallels.)

In this context, let me first cite Attila József. The last section of his 1935 poem *Majd emlékezni jó lesz* [It Will Be Good to Remember] expresses a partial retraction or at least a questioning of utopia (the left-wing utopia of overcoming alienation) from the perspective of the end of history—perhaps the state of affairs after a violent revolution. Here, the motifs of play, peace, and animal existence are emphatic and interrelated:

Then the spilled blood will fade
and everything that hurts today will bring a smile,
then we will play like peaceful animals
and it will be good to remember and to die.⁴³

Secondly, returning once again to Márai, it is worth noting that Kojève identifies this state, which Hegel placed after the end of history, with the contemporary “American way of life.”⁴⁴ Kojève’s description parallels Márai’s ideas about the ‘middle class’ replacing the ‘bourgeoisie’ (‘polgárság,’ or ‘das Bildungsbürgertum’ – this cannot be translated into a single English word) and expressed in numerous places, ranging from his novels to his essays and diaries. This middle class no longer creates, it only consumes, embodying the “consumer civilization” of the masses. For Márai, this does not apply exclusively to America, although the New World is evidently a telling example.⁴⁵ In Márai’s case, these ideas are based on José Ortega y Gasset’s well-known work *The Revolt of the Masses*. For both Ortega and Márai, there is a strong emphasis on the technological and socio-political processes that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to the biological and material well-being of the masses, which, of course—and this is partly the subject of their criticism—has nothing to do with the ‘good life’ in the ancient sense.

And finally, I refer to the afterlife of the pigs in *Peace in Itahaka* by turning to Szilárd Borbély’s collection of poetry *Bukolikatájban* [Bucolic Tales]. More precisely,

43 Majd a kiontott vértócsa fakó lesz
s mosolyra fakaszt mind, ami ma bánt,
majd játszunk békés állatok gyanánt
és emlékezni s meghalni is jó lesz.

44 Agamben, *The Open*, 11; Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 161.

45 For the term “consumer civilization (konzumcivilizáció),” see Márai, *Zendülők. Féltékenyek*, 9; Márai, “Röpirat a nemzetnevelés ügyében,” 139–41. It would be worthwhile to systematically examine Márai’s view of the USA, the reasons for his favourable and unfavourable judgments, and their relationship to each other, because this is where Márai’s entire conception of mass and consumer society, in all its sharpest ambivalences, is likely to be concentrated. For this, from the viewpoint of ‘liberal democracy,’ see: Kulcsár-Szabó, *A gondolkodás háborúi*, 251–55.

I wonder whether one of Borbély's poems is related to Márai's work. Only by careful examination can we reveal the kind of relationship that connects the two authors' thought. However, it is certain that the mythological motif of Circe, Odysseus, and the pig is also present in Borbély's poetry. In his 2013 poem entitled *Circe, Pig's Heart* [Kirké, disznószíve], Borbély revolves the story around the axis of 'metamorphosis.' In the poem, metamorphosis refers to the slaughter and processing of a pig. Besides, Borbély reinterprets the topos of the gods' presence—borrowed from the idyllic genre—by relating it to the story of Christ's suffering, and perhaps even to the terrible death of his mother:

"The silence of the longest night / was close by. But the stench that follows screaming / had entered the land. At these times, my mother sat in the kitchen, / (...) she peeled the garlic after the red onion, / because it drew the tears from her eyes. And she listened / to the music before the five a.m. news because the gods, / with their harmonies, were sending a message through the ether."⁴⁶

The dual, even contradictory image of the pigs in Márai's novel shows the exact duality that Agamben draws attention to in Kojève's interpretation of Hegel. After the end of history, there is, on the one hand, the society of the depoliticized and economized masses (Márai's satisfied pigs) who do not look beyond consumption, 'experiences' (cf. G. Schulze's 'Erlebnisgesellschaft') 'well-being' and 'entertainment' composed of momentary pleasures. On the other hand, in the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, there is a form of depoliticization which takes biological life, to speak with Agamben, the 'bare life' "as the supreme political (or rather impolitical) task,"⁴⁷ and reduces the life of its subjects to this state (Márai's pigs deprived of their humanity). Like so many others in the twentieth century, from Heidegger through Kojève to Agamben, Márai may have seen that we are in fact talking about two sides of the same coin. Were they right? The resolution of this ideological dilemma is beyond the scope of this paper, and of philology for that matter. In any case, it marks Márai's erudition and, above all, his creativity that he painted a bucolic landscape at the beginning of Télegonos's narrative in an epic setting, and it is against this backdrop, indeed from within this bucolic milieu, that the novel develops one of its most radical and today particularly timely bio- and zoopolitical themes.

46 Translated by Ottilie Mulzet. "A leghosszabb éjszaka csendje / közel volt. De a sikolyt követő bűz belepte / a tájat. Anyám ilyenkor ült bent a konyhában, / (...) az apró gerezdű / fokhagymát pucolta lassan, a vöröshagyma után, / mert ez marta ki két szeméből a könnyet. És / hallgatta az öt órás hírek előtti zenét, hisz az / istenek a harmóniákkal üzentek az éteren által."

47 Agamben, *The Open*, 76. The biopolitical aspect is, of course, also present in the first social formation mentioned (cp. 'health insurance'), and is in fact essentially linked to it in its current peak form (cp. 'health industry').

To sum up, it is striking that the novel *Peace in Ithaka*, more markedly than any of Márai's previous works, raises doubts about the realizability of the modern, self-fulfilling, creative, and self-created 'individual' or 'personality' in the mid-twentieth century. What is more, there are doubts about the very existence and, indeed, the absolute value of this 'man' and 'individuality'. These doubts appear in the ambivalent representation and conception of human–animal relations, as foregrounded by the narrated world's connection to the bucolic tradition. For Márai, this is obviously not unrelated to the experience of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century and World War II, but it is also in line with some earlier (Plutarch, La Fontaine) and contemporary Hungarian and European developments in literature (Attila József, Gyula Juhász) and in the history of thought (Kojève) that have radically questioned the anthropocentric view.

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