

Infinite and Finite Turns

Apostrophe in de Man, Derrida, and Lőrinc Szabó

Hajnalka Halász 

Humboldt-University of Berlin, 6 Unter den Linden, 10117 Berlin, Germany;
halaszhajnalka@gmail.com

Received 26 February 2026 | Accepted 5 May 2026 | Published online 14 August 2026

Abstract. This article reconstructs conceptions of apostrophe and tests their explanatory force through close readings of two poems of Hungarian late modernism: Lőrinc Szabó's "Materialism" (1928) and "For Nothing, Entirely" (1931).

It distinguishes three configurations of apostrophe. In the triadic model taken up from classical rhetoric by Heinz Schlaffer and Jonathan Culler, apostrophe presupposes speaker, addressee, and witness: by turning from the audience to an absent or non-human "you," it installs a third position as observer. De Man, by contrast, designates apostrophe as prosopopeia: an asymmetrical positing that gives a perceptible face to an imperceptible addressee and sets in motion an infinite specular exchange without external reference or witnessing third. Derrida proceeds from this account but shifts its emphasis: the potentially infinite substitutions of prosopopeia must be interrupted by a finite other whose finitude—its mortality, its quasi-death, its being *as if already dead*—renders it at once enclosed within this specular movement and excluded from it. The contrast between "infinite" and "finite" turns marks the decisive difference between de Man and Derrida.

The readings show that Szabó's poems stage not only the inescapability of prosopopeia's specular logic—within which the subject is irretrievably enclosed and from which no appeal to a third position can provide release—but, precisely for that reason, the subject's simultaneous exclusion from itself. Finitude understood as the simultaneity of enclosure within and exclusion from oneself—as a non-coincidence with oneself—is not a loss but the condition of an unconditional turning toward the other.

Keywords: apostrophe, prosopopeia, finitude, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Lőrinc Szabó

Introduction: Three approaches to apostrophe

In theories of lyric, poetic address is commonly described as the gesture that brings the inanimate or the absent to life and renders it present.¹ Such a definition is not neutral. It presupposes a metaphysical alignment of life with presence and of death

1 For the history of the definitions of apostrophe, see Culler, "Apostrophe," 59–69; Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 186–243.

with absence, and it assigns to apostrophe the task of restoring life—or the present of speech—as a return to itself through its own other, that is, through what appears as dead matter. In this account, death is not merely acknowledged but reversed: what has been irreversibly lost is translated into living presence and made repeatable.

Because the transformation of the unrepeatable into the repeatable is a condition of language and understanding, apostrophe can, with Paul de Man, be understood as prosopopeia: the figure that confers voice and face, and thus the figure of reading—indeed of understanding as such.² From this perspective, prosopopeia is not simply one rhetorical device among others in lyric or prose (including autobiographical discourse or writing oriented toward self-understanding). It is more fundamental. It has epistemological force insofar as it produces the subject's relation to itself and to the other as a specular, tropological structure grounded in the exchange of properties. In this way, it establishes the conditions under which the world becomes accessible. Address, understood in this sense, substitutes a repeatable sign for something unrepeatable. Yet what it replaces becomes accessible only in the mode of inaccessibility. The addressee is animated precisely by being silenced:

“As soon as we understand the rhetorical function of prosopopeia as positing voice or face by means of language, we also understand that what we are deprived of is not life but the shape and the sense of a world accessible only in the privative way of understanding. Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography (the prosopopeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores.”³

De Man draws this conclusion through an analysis of Wordsworth's *Essays upon Epitaphs*, undertaken as a critical reassessment of Philippe Lejeune's claim that “the identity of autobiography is not only representational and cognitive but contractual, grounded not in tropes but in speech acts.”⁴ For de Man, the identity of both the lyric “I” and the authorial name depends primarily on tropological operations and only secondarily on conventional agreement. Prosopopeia, in this sense, is a positing act that is at once asymmetrical and generative of symmetrical substitutions, setting in motion an uncontrollable specular chain: between I and I, I and you, and authorial and readerly selves. It is this movement that prevents the subject's identity—whether lyric, authorial, or readerly—from attaining epistemological grounding. Such identity can be secured only through conventional agreement, contract, or signature,

2 On de Man's concept of prosopopeia, see de Man, “Autobiography as De-facement,” 67–81; de Man, “Hypogram and Inscription,” 27–53; Chase, “Giving a Face to a Name,” 82–109.

3 De Man, “Autobiography as De-facement,” 80–81.

4 De Man, “Autobiography as De-facement,” 71.

which appear to offer an escape from the “linguistic predicament” generated by specular substitutions and the labyrinthine system of tropes. Yet these compelled—or merely apparent—solutions, de Man argues, demonstrate precisely “the necessity to escape from the topology of the subject and the equally inevitable reinscription of this necessity within a specular model of cognition.”⁵

We are thus, on the one hand, inescapably *enclosed* within this specular system—the hallucinatory mechanisms of language and consciousness that produce what de Man calls a “linguistic predicament,” since no external referential point of orientation is available to guide us. Within this specular play everything is “mere” appearance; and there is no beyond of appearance—nothing self-identical, nothing undivided. On the other hand, we must in a certain sense also be *excluded* from it, for it is impossible to remain within the endless, groundless rotation of tropes. This movement must be brought to a halt by conventional means, by an act of arbitrariness that is itself without foundation—hence “the necessity to escape from the topology of the subject.”

De Man thus understands apostrophe, or prosopopeia, as a trope rather than as a speech act whose validity depends on conventional guarantees or on a context external to the rhetoric of tropes. (Within lyric theory, Heinz Schläffer’s conception may serve as one example of this latter position, to which we return briefly below.) This is why, in the essay cited above, de Man distinguishes the *proper name*—structured tropologically—from the conventional act of the *signature*,⁶ which relies on laws external to tropological language in order to ground self-identity or secure the subject’s identifiability. The difficulty of sustaining this distinction becomes evident in the fact that, in another essay, de Man aligns the proper name not with trope but with referential identification, that is, with anthropomorphism.⁷ There is no space here to pursue further the question of the proper name in de Man’s sense—its oscillation between trope and reference, positing and exchange, and between the rhetoric of cognition and that of persuasion—a question inseparable from the problem of

5 De Man, “Autobiography as De-facement,” 72.

6 “The fact that Lejeune uses »proper name« and »signature« interchangeably signals both the confusion and the complexity of the problem. For just as it is impossible for him to stay within the tropological system of the name and just as he has to move from ontological identity to contractual promise, as soon as the performative function is asserted, it is at once reinscribed within cognitive constraints.” De Man, “Autobiography as De-facement,” 71.

7 “But »anthropomorphism« is not just a trope but an identification on the level of substance. It takes one entity for another and thus implies the constitution of specific entities prior to their confusion, the *taking* of something for something else that can then be assumed to be *given*. Anthropomorphism freezes the infinite chain of tropological transformations and propositions into one single assertion or essence which, as such, excludes all others. It is no longer a proposition but a proper name [...]” De Man, “Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric,” 241.

referential authority.⁸ In the present context, however, if the boundaries between the different conceptions of apostrophe are to become visible, it is necessary to recall a third position, namely Derrida's concept of the signature.

Although Derrida, in speaking of the donation of the name—or more precisely of the *donation of the signature by the other*, a formulation that differs from de Man's emphasis on the *giving or positing of a face or name*—often invokes the language of contract, engagement, or alliance, this configuration cannot be understood in terms of the opposition between cognition and convention, trope and reference, or constative and performative. Yet it becomes intelligible only against the background of de Man's account of prosopopeia, through a reading of what Derrida calls the “sovereign, secret, discreet, and ideal signature.”⁹ From this perspective, prosopopeia is a signature, though not—or not merely—in the sense of conventional authentication. In his essay dedicated to the memory and work of de Man, Derrida draws attention, among other passages, to those sections of “Autobiography as De-facement” that articulate the impossibility of escaping the hallucinatory specularity of tropes: the closure of consciousness, cognition, and the language that constitutes them as a system of tropes, a system without external reference and without ultimate foundation. From de Man's perspective, the uncontrollable reversals of such dualities can be managed only through the positing of a third position—metaphysical, aesthetic, dialectical, or, in other terms, ideological or conventional. Yet this positing ultimately repeats the arbitrary act that set the process in motion in the first place, an act that, precisely because of its arbitrariness, cannot itself be grounded.¹⁰

8 This oscillation concerns the status—left unresolved in de Man—of a referential and conventional authority that, as it were, remains outside language conceived as the rhetoric of tropes (on this, see Kulcsár-Szabó, *Tetten érhetetlen szavak*, esp. “Narratíva, hazugság, kérdés,” 315–54). Austinian speech-act theory may, among other things, constitute such an outside to de Man's tropological account. See also Kulcsár-Szabó, *Boldogtalan beszédaktusok*.

9 Derrida, “Mnemosyne,” 26.

10 What de Man criticizes in the positing of a third position is precisely the ungroundability of the act of positing (*Setzung*) itself, a problem Werner Hamacher examines in several essays from a different but closely related perspective. In “The Second of Inversion,” for example, Hamacher analyzes the simultaneously positing and reversing logic of prosopopeia in Kant, Hegel, Rilke, and Celan. Whereas in Kant and Hegel inversion still functions as a stabilizing figure of position, securing the relations between I and Thou and between subject and object, and whereas in Rilke this stabilizing force of inversion is already shaken, Hamacher argues that it is only in Celan that inversion exposes its own impossibility, or rather its impossible possibility. Through Hamacher's analysis of Celan's poetic techniques of inversion, what comes into view is an irreducible and non-appropriable absence or negativity—what Hamacher, in related contexts, calls withdrawal (*Entzug*), deposing (*Entsetzung*), and disfiguration or distortion (*Entstellung*)—that may be brought into relation with de Man's concept of inscription. See Werner Hamacher, “The Second of Inversion: Movements of a Figure through Celan's Poetry,” in *Premises: Essays*

Derrida is concerned above all with the question of when one may—or rather *must*—interrupt this model of prosopopeia’s specularity, its infinite speculation: not by bringing it to an end, but by exceeding it. Such exceeding does not consist in introducing into the tropological system—structured by irreducible ruptures, material-differential traces, or inscription—some external, conventional, referential, dialectical, aesthetic, or metaphysical supplement that would mediate between otherwise incommensurable sides. For Derrida, the paradigmatic case is the death of the other—the situation, indeed the “tropology” of mourning. The question thus becomes: “[W]hen one is in memory of the other, in bereaved memory of a friend, is it desirable to think of and to pass beyond this hallucination, beyond a prosopopeia of prosopopeia?”¹¹ It will become important later that Derrida’s question does not concern the *possibility*—or, under the pressure of a predicament, the *necessity*—of interrupting specularity. Rather, it concerns its *imperative*: a kind of an obligation without condition. In this shift, the emphasis moves from the epistemology of apostrophe as an impossible and therefore unconditional turning toward the other to the ethical implications of that turn. Although turning toward the other is impossible, it is precisely for that reason that one *must* turn toward the other.

Let us consider, in a passage drawn from a longer argument yet exemplary—and instructive for what follows—how Derrida conceives the exceeding of prosopopeia. In this passage, de Manian prosopopeia—understood as the specular, closed, hallucinatory structure of the *self*—is brought into relation with the finitude of memory and with the finitude of the *other*. This finitude marks at once both the possibility and the impossibility of preserving the other in memory:

“If death exists, that is to say, if it happens and happens only once, to the other and to oneself, it is the moment when there is no longer any choice—could we even think of any other—except that between memory and hallucination. If death comes to the other, and comes to us through the other,

on *Philosophy and Literature from Kant to Celan*, trans. Peter Fenves (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 222–63. In Celan, inversion is not a dialectical reversal that would secure a higher synthesis, but the precarization of *Setzung* through its own impossibility, an impossibility that at the same time conditions its possibility. In this sense, Hamacher’s account is close to de Man’s self-subverting conception of performativity and, more specifically, to the latter’s notion of materiality: not as a founding act, but as a break or resistance that prevents tropological relations from stabilizing and exchanges from reaching closure. Hamacher’s “LECTIO: de Man’s Imperative” appears to bring this impossible possibility closer to Derrida by emphasizing the imperative dimension within it. See Werner Hamacher, “LECTIO: de Man’s Imperative,” trans. Susan Bernstein, in *Reading de Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich, *Theory and History of Literature* 59 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 171–201.

11 Derrida, “Mnemosyne,” 28.

then the friend no longer exists except *in* us, *between* us. In himself, by himself, of himself, he is no more, nothing more. He lives only in us. But *we* are never *ourselves*, and between us, identical to us, a “self” is never in itself or identical to itself. This specular reflection never closes on itself; it does not appear *before* this *possibility* of mourning, before and outside this structure of allegory and prosopopeia which constitutes in advance all “being-in-us,” “in-me,” between us, or between ourselves. The *selbst*, the *soi-même*, the self appears to itself only in this bereaved allegory, in this hallucinatory prosopopeia—and even before the death of the other actually happens, as we say, in “reality.” The strange situation I am describing here, for example that of my friendship with Paul de Man, would have allowed me to say all of this *before* his death. It suffices that I know him to be mortal, that he knows me to be mortal—there is no friendship without this knowledge of finitude. And everything that we inscribe in the living present of our relation to others already carries, always, the signature of *memoirs-from-beyond-the-grave*. [...] this finitude can only take that form through the trace of the other in us, the other’s irreducible precedence; in other words, simply the trace, which is always the trace of the other, the finitude of memory, and thus the approach or remembrance of the future.”¹²

Our most fundamental relation to the other is mourning. It is fundamental because we mourn the other even before any “actual” death has occurred—the other is, for us, *as if already always dead*. This anticipatory mourning arises from our own mortality: we carry within ourselves the possibility of death. Our finitude, our own end, separates us from the other irreversibly even during the other’s lifetime, just as death itself would. For the same reason, memory is finite. We cannot fully enclose the other within it, just as we cannot fully enclose ourselves; nor can we coincide with ourselves or be wholly present to ourselves. This non-coincidence is threatening, *as though we were already dead*—excluded from our own living interiority. It is perhaps in order to evade this condition that we resort to techniques of linguistic interiorization, such as apostrophe’s reversing gesture, which seeks to reanimate the dead. Yet what appears as threat is nothing other than mortality itself: finite existence exposed to risk and unforeseeable turns. The *possibility of mourning* is therefore the experience in which it appears *as though* the other were dead; and the *experience of mortality*—the possibility of death—appears *as though* I were dead. *Everything begins from this semblance*, this hallucination, this finite memory, this allegory of mourning. The other’s “actual” death merely discloses what has always already been at work within us—the impossible possibility of mourning the other. For the other, in its alterity,

12 Derrida, “Mnemosyne,” 28–29.

remains separated from me, unknowable and opaque, as though already dead. With this emerges the impossible possibility of relation to the other as such. My finitude is inseparable from the finitude of the other. The other's finitude—its trace, its irreversible absence—has always already inhabited me. It is not a metaphorical death but the originary structure of mortality itself. From this structure arises specular reflection: the self's relation to itself and to the other, for instance, in the figures of prosopopeia. Finitude precedes and exceeds the specularity; it prevents prosopopeia from closing upon itself. Tropological and specular movement—which, from de Man's perspective, could in principle repeat infinitely—is, according to Derrida, *at once limited and opened by finitude*. Mourning is therefore both possible and impossible. It is not merely the interiorization of the finite other within memory, but the experience of the other's inappropriable excess. In mourning, the other becomes part of us while simultaneously exceeding us, resisting every totalization.

At this point, the conception of writing, trace, or *différance*—familiar from Derrida's early work—appears as finitude itself: as the trace or signature left within us by the other, a finite mark, a kind of posthumous address or memoir. This trace, in turn, calls for the countersignature of another mortal, for another finite trace. It is this demand that constitutes the imperative of preserving the other in memory—an imperative directed toward what is in fact impossible: the *affirmation* of that turn, that *secret bond or alliance* which binds us to the other at any given moment and turns us toward it.¹³ Such a signature does not create passage to absolute alterity—to the other who comes unpredictably from an unbridgeable and irreducible distance, to the future toward which apostrophe turns unconditionally, without condition of possibility, program, or technique. It does not posit; it leaves a trace and affirms—it signs.

From the first conception of apostrophe as the reanimation of the dead, through de Man's account of prosopopeia and its specular logic, to Derrida's emphasis on finitude, we thus arrive at the preservation—and bearing—of the mortal other in memory, at the imperative of mourning. How can these displacements and distinctions—touching on the linguistic, poetic-theoretical, epistemological, and ethical dimensions of apostrophe—be brought to bear on the practice of lyric interpretation? While numerous examples can be found of applications of the first

13 See also the following passage: "What, then, is *true mourning*? [...] are we *capable* of doing it, do we have the *power* to do it? But also, do we have the *right*? Is it right to do so? Is it also the *duty* and movement of fidelity? [...] This experience is mournful in its very essence; it gathers itself together, it assembles itself to contract alliance with itself, only in the impossible affirmation of mourning. But this impossible affirmation must be possible: this singular affirmative affirmation *must* affirm the impossible, without which it is only a report, a technics, a recording. The impossible here is the other, such as he comes to us: as a mortal, to us mortals. And whom we love as such, affirming this to be good." Derrida, "Mnemosyne," 31–32.

two conceptions of apostrophe,¹⁴ the far-reaching consequences of the Derridean displacement of this problematic are only now beginning to emerge.¹⁵ The present analysis examines the partly conflicting implications inherent in competing conceptions of poetic address in two poems of Hungarian literary modernism that stage these problems with particular force: Lőrinc Szabó's "Materializmus" (Materialism, 1928) and "Semmiért Egészen" (For Nothing, Entirely, 1931).

"Materialism"

One of the most memorable examples of apostrophic animation in Hungarian literary modernism is Lőrinc Szabó's poem "Materializmus" ("Materialism"), which has not yet been subjected to a detailed, systematic reading.¹⁶ The poem stages a ritual animation and exaltation of matter and may be read not only as an allegory of apostrophe but, inseparably from this, as a kind of inverted prayer. In the version included in the volume *Te meg a világ* (*You and the World*, 1932), God's indivisible self-presence is simultaneously invoked and excluded by the poem's rhetoric. The "God" of "Materialism" is none other than matter itself, whose presentation in the poem turns into its opposite. This reversal may be understood as the culmination of a materialism pushed to its extreme limit—a materialism whose fulfillment coincides with what appears to be its contrary: spiritualism. The poem thus begins from the human being's relation to matter—more precisely, to its own worldly, bodily, finite, and mortal existence. Matter here is not substance but the embodiment of finitude itself: an insurmountable limit, mortality as such. At the same time, it figures the other—one's fellow human beings—who thereby assume traits of a divine or otherworldly character. In the absence of an English translation, I offer a prose rendering of the original Hungarian poem,¹⁷ marking in parentheses a decisive grammatical ambiguity that will become central to the argument:

14 Primarily, of course, in de Man himself, or in Jonathan Culler's example-rich theoretical study of lyric, Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 186–243.

15 For a paradigmatic elaboration of Derrida's account of mourning and survival within Hungarian late modern poetry, see Bónus, *Élő halál*.

16 A more detailed recent study of the poem is Bakó, "Az anyag mítosza," 74–80. Bakó interprets "Materialism" as the expression of Lőrinc Szabó's materialist worldview and accordingly reads what he calls its "homogeneous" (80) poetic discourse as an unequivocal "statement of position" (cp., for example, "Undoubtedly, the materialism as conceived by the poet might here and there fail to satisfy the dogmatic Marxist, yet the intention of taking a stand is beyond doubt," 79). As will become clear, however, the poem suspends precisely suchthetic reference.

17 Szabó, *Te meg a világ*, 14–16.

Materialism

In the street I sometimes stop, startled,
and look at what I have never before seen:
everywhere the souls of new gods are shedding their skins
and specters move about in matter.
And the asphalt is no longer asphalt beneath me,
and I no longer dare step anywhere,
for everywhere I shatter hidden lives
for no reason at all, somewhere
in the matter that slaves away for me.

My mother is matter, a benevolent miracle:
my teeth chattered in the dreadful winter
and coal came, wood came down from the mountains
and silently cast its body upon the pyre for me;
and stone came and climbed into the clouds
and surrounded me with a cave and blossomed
to be more beautiful for my eyes; and iron came,
and iron comes every day, becomes a hammer
and tool and blacksmith,
and beats itself, its arms
do not tire of holding up my house,
others bend, burn, and cool,
flatten into sheets, round into circles,
sweat, wear down, labor, decay,
day laborers of such eternal misery,
more selfless even than the animal;
rubber conforms to my car's wheel,
an ore-bird flutters so I may sit upon its back,
gasoline explodes so that I may fly,
and all the rest, my shoes and my clothes
and my furniture, my glass, my pencil,
my dishes, my lamp, my book, my oil,

humbly and patiently,
why they labor, tell me, why:

why does the body labor for the soul?

A detailed analysis of the poem is not possible here; in the present context, the focus will remain on the role of apostrophic turns. The vision of matter coming to life initially appears as a tropological circulation: as the process by which matter—as raw material—is utilized, exploited, and “consumed” in both nature and culture. In this movement, matter serves life imperceptibly, in a self-sacrificial and self-annulling manner: “and all the rest, everything that exists,” “comes and comes toward me, to be consumed by my life.” At first glance, and seemingly supported by the syntax of the original, this suggests a straightforward reading: my life uses up the thousand-faced matter, “matter which for me assumed a thousand forms.” Matter thus appears as a figure capable of assuming any shape, any name, any form. Insofar as there are no purely spiritual or immaterial beings, everything has a material dimension; all existence is bound to bodily being and is therefore mutable, perishable, and transient. Matter is both one and many: as “everything that exists,” the “only reality,” it names a principle whose instances could be multiplied indefinitely.

“The suicide of matter is life.” From this proposition, the movement of the poem initially appears as the paradoxical process by which the life of matter serves a form of life—a dialectical life-form—that preserves matter precisely by negating it. Matter’s self-sacrifice seems directed toward the maintenance of life: toward becoming immaterial through its own suicide, and thus serving life in the very act of annihilating itself. This circulation begins with raw material—coal, wood, stone, iron—from which emerges a self-creating tool: it “becomes a hammer / and tool and blacksmith, / and beats itself.” From there it becomes a cultural product (“my furniture, my glass, my pencil”), which in turn serves the needs generated by modern society—“my speed, my comfort”—and finally approaches immateriality, as in the “music of trembling strings and keys.” The end product of this process is not only pure, exalted spirit but also matter reduced “into trash, into rags, into disgust.” In this reduction, the hierarchy of matter and spirit, base and sublime, impurity and purity silently reasserts itself. This form of life debases, incorporates, consumes, and finally expels from itself—out of the inner, supposedly pure sphere of spirit—the living-dead matter that has always already been suicidal.

The central force of this exchange is life, or, more precisely, a particular conception of life: a self-serving life that understands (or misunderstands) itself as pure spirit and thereby empties out and annihilates its own material conditions—and with them, itself. From this perspective, it becomes intelligible why Lóránt Kabdebó,

in his monographs on Lőrinc Szabó,¹⁸ repeatedly discusses this poem in connection with “Vezér” (The Leader, 1928):¹⁹

“[...]

The goal: I am, the goal: I myself,
and something else, which I myself do not understand
and which yet lives, as in the sowing
the harvest, as in me the people:
this secret goal uses me too,
as I use others [...]

The subordinated and cast-off matter and the self-serving life quietly use—and use up—one another. This parallel helps clarify that the form of life depicted in the second section of “Materialism” is itself the product of a circular movement: one that takes itself to be absolute, undivided presence, an end in itself, a kind of *God*. It returns to itself only through its other—through what it excludes as external, through matter, through its own conditions and subordinates—while simultaneously turning these inside out and expelling them. Such a form of life presupposes that body and soul are separable. It treats spirit as detachable from matter and capable of purification, as though this circulation could continue indefinitely, as though life were never limited by the finitude of matter.

Whereas the first two sections present themselves as descriptive—staging the visionary life-course of matter and its unnoticed labor—the apostrophe of the third section marks a decisive turn: away from vision and toward the friends. In doing so, it places the preceding description within a communicative frame. What appeared as vision now becomes admonition and persuasion. The speaker addresses his friends in order to expose the misleading character of this conception of life or self-understanding and implicitly calls upon them to transform their relation to body and matter. The injunction—one might paraphrase it as a call to “believe in matter” or to “respect matter”—is enacted by the very address that the addressees themselves would have to repeat, affirm, and countersign: “My friends, how am I to believe in anything other / than matter? The only reality / is matter”—yes, I believe in matter, which is always other; I believe in the other. To believe in matter here means to affirm what is always other.

18 See, for example, Kabdebó, “A vers kriminalizálódása,” 59.

19 Szabó, *Harc az ünnepért*, 111–12.

As a comparison with another version of the poem confirms,²⁰ monotheistic faith here yields to belief in the “only” reality of the thousand-faced matter; debased matter assumes the place of the supreme authority, taking the place of God. A parallel thus emerges between the lowest and the most sublime: both recede into a secret, inaccessible distance. At the same time, however, the suicidal life of matter differs from God’s—or spirit’s—absolute presence to itself, from the ideal of eternal life. It is precisely the self-dividing, finite labor of suicidal matter that produces the illusion of an immaterial spirit present to itself—of presence as such, of the bodiless soul, of eternal life. “The suicide of matter is life.” Everything turns on whether this formulation is read dialectically or non-dialectically.

The vivid description of matter’s unnoticed, self-sacrificial labor and miracle thus serves as evidence that it is impossible to believe in anything other than matter—and therefore that one must believe in it. The speaker of the poem stages himself as a witness to a miracle: to the animation of matter and to its self-sacrifice. This testimony leads to a revaluation of one’s relation to matter. With the turn in the third section, the poetic I shifts from the earthly and otherworldly, the sensible and imperceptible, from both living and dead matter, toward mortal friends. In doing so, it bears witness to a transformation in faith or worldview brought about by a visionary experience. The poem thereby becomes a public, almost ritual act of speech that presupposes an audience of witnesses. It is as though the apostrophic turn produces a situation that Jonathan Culler and Heinz Schlaffer describe as characteristic of lyric’s indirect communicative structure. At this point, it becomes necessary to consider the respective definitions of apostrophe in Schlaffer, Culler, and de Man in order to describe more precisely the apostrophic turns of the poem.

Turning Away / Turning Toward: Schlaffer / Culler / de Man

Schlaffer proceeds from the assumption that poetry originally fulfilled a cultic function: in archaic societies, it served as a medium for communicating, within ritually fixed forms, with supernatural powers. Analogous to the priestly invocation of a god within a collective rite, the lyric situation likewise comprises three positions: the speaker, the transcendent addressee, and the “indirect observer,”²¹ that is, the audience. Schlaffer designates this kind of poetic address as the “invocation” or “calling” (“Anrufung”) of the transcendent and distinguishes it from the rhetorical concept of apostrophe, which he reserves for the exceptional cases of a direct turn toward

20 In another version of the poem, the speaker addresses not his friends but God: “My God, how am I to believe in anything other / than matter?” Szabó, “Materialismus,” 269–70.

21 Schlaffer, *Geistersprache*, 23–24.

the audience.²² Despite this terminological shift, what Schlaffer calls “invocation” structurally coincides with those conceptions of apostrophe that, drawing on ancient rhetoric, define it as an indirect speech situation grounded in a turning away in order to turn toward.

Like Schlaffer, Culler begins from a triadic communicative situation: speaker, addressee, and audience. In his account, too, the structure of apostrophe is “indirect”: insofar as the speaker turns directly toward the addressee, he necessarily turns away from the audience and thus addresses it only indirectly.²³ Apostrophe thus directs itself immediately to the addressee and only mediately to the audience. Although Culler likewise emphasizes the theatrical and ritual character of this turning toward and away, he does not regard the three speech positions and their relations as structurally predetermined. Instead, he foregrounds the constitutive turn of apostrophe itself:

“Quintilian, speaking of oratory, defines apostrophe as »a diversion of our words to address someone other than the judge« [...] In forensic rhetoric, apostrophe is a turning from the actual audience to address someone or something else (the opponent, the fatherland, justice), and the etymology of the term emphasizes the turning rather than the anomalous address; but outside the courtroom, apostrophe has long denoted address to someone or something other than the actual audience; it includes address to individuals, but it especially denotes address to what is not an actual listener: abstractions, inanimate objects, or persons absent or dead.²⁴

Culler illustrates the driving force of apostrophe—its impulse to bring the addressee to life—through, among other examples, Rilke’s “Ninth Elegy,” which in his reading displays apostrophe’s desire “that the things of the earth function as *thous* when addressed. If they are subjects, they seek, like all subjects, to transcend a purely material condition.”²⁵ According to Culler, this animating force explains why apostrophe often performs either the interiorization of the external or the projection of the self into the outer world. Although, in opposition to Schlaffer and in the wake of de Man, Culler locates the distinctive achievement of apostrophe not in the actual vivification of the addressee but in the production of the illusion or promise of such vivification—a technique that in a sense “knows” its own impossibility—his definition nonetheless remains close to Schlaffer’s model. In his account as well, poetic address turns toward a non-human addressee while turning away

22 Schlaffer, *Geistersprache*, 24–25.

23 Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 243.

24 Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 212.

25 Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 224.

from the (human) audience—an audience not excluded from the speech situation but constituted as its witness.

There is no scope here for a detailed reconstruction and comparison of the various conceptions of poetic address, and even this excursus exceeds the limits of the present study. Yet a further detour to Paul de Man's concept of prosopopeia cannot be avoided, for only against this background do the stakes of the turns at issue become visible. Beyond the already cited "Autobiography as De-facement," this problematic includes de Man's essay on Michael Riffaterre's conception of literature, which traces the problem of deixis and sensory certainty back to the trope of prosopopeia,²⁶ as well as two essays on Hegel: one addressing the relation between sense-certainty and language,²⁷ the other examining the sublime, where the absolute beautiful—or the sublime—emerges in the event of an unbridgeable rupture between the divine and the human, and between the non-sensuous and the sensuous.²⁸ From this constellation, only those elements strictly necessary for our purposes will be outlined here in schematic form.

One of the decisive differences between de Man's concept of prosopopeia and the accounts of poetic address offered by Culler and Schlaffer concerns the status of the turn. For de Man, the turn away operates as a substitution that irrevocably effaces what it replaces. The sign that takes the place of non-sensuous, imperceptible, and thus abstract entities—such as consciousness, spirit, or time—does not simply render them accessible; it renders them accessible only as inaccessible. By contrast, Culler and Schlaffer retain a third position in the figure of the audience—precisely the position that, from de Man's perspective, the turn or substitution eliminates. Yet it would be more accurate to speak not of retention but of dialectical production. The ever-present third, whom the turning-away-toward installs as witness or external observer of the communicative situation, is no more given in advance within the text than are the figures of the I and the you. These too come into being only through an initial, arbitrary positing—through a trope, the trope of prosopopeia—within the turns of language grounded in the exchange of properties.

In brief: whereas de Man proceeds from the simultaneity and tension of two moments—an asymmetrical positing and a symmetrical substitution, or, if one prefers, a turning away and a turning toward—between which, as between the non-sensuous and the sensuous, there is no continuity or passage, the tripartite division proposed by Schlaffer and Culler introduces a dialectical pattern in which the third position functions to resolve this tension. This third figure—whether named the

26 De Man, "Hypogram and Inscription."

27 Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," 91–104.

28 De Man, "Hegel on the Sublime," 105–16.

audience, the implied reader, or even God—marks a metaphysical position that the movement of language, in its tendency toward reference and substantial identification, repeatedly produces. In doing so, it demonstrates what de Man calls “the necessity to escape from the tropology of the subject”: the positing of a supreme, authorizing instance that reconciles the unbridgeable distance between the non-sensuous and the sensuous spheres. According to de Man, *prosopopeia*—the figure that posits a face—grants sensible appearance to what is imperceptible. Yet it gives voice to the supersensible only by silencing and effacing it in the very act of address, that is, in the act of positing and substitution. One crucial implication follows: such address *cannot be observed from the outside*, from a third position. It can only be performed or repeated. For this reason, the reader is always already implicated in the turning-away-and-toward, or more precisely, in the substitutive and thereby erasing act of poetic address. *Prosopopeia* is therefore not merely one poetic device among others but the figure of the reader and of reading itself.²⁹ From this perspective, the reader does not bear witness; the reader repeats.

At first glance, the turns in “Materialism” appear to correspond to the Schlafferian and Cullerian accounts of apostrophe. It seems as though the address to the friends establishes three positions: the I speaks directly to the friends and indirectly to—or about—matter. Yet a closer reading shows that this apostrophic turn exceeds both models and points instead toward a technique of poetic address that can be described more adequately, alongside de Man, with recourse to Derrida.

In this poem, the relations between earthly and otherworldly, human and divine, sensuous and non-sensuous cannot be assigned to stable roles within a communicative structure. The decisive reason lies in the finitude of the figures produced by apostrophe—that is, in their division, their irreducible self-difference as the condition of (sur) life. Matter is not an undivided or self-identical substance. Rather, it names the temporality and perishability of spirit, its inseparable corporeality: the finitude of the body as an internal, recurrent death—“suicide”—as unnoticed labor or limit constitutive of life and survival. This finitude—this programmed, automatic, ever-recurring death—does not remain enclosed within itself. It turns outward, casts itself into time, continually differentiates itself from itself, and in doing so repeatedly turns the I toward something wholly other: toward an unpredictable and indeterminate other whose own turns cannot be anticipated. It cannot be determined when, in which direction, or toward whom speech will turn. Accordingly, the positions of addresser, addressee, and witness cannot be fixed along the oppositions of presence and absence, living spirit and dead matter, action and observation, or speaker and listener. Each position substitutes for another, speaks in the name of another, turns from one toward the other. They cannot be sharply separated; yet neither can they be collapsed into identity.

29 De Man, “Hypogram and Inscription,” 45.

The challenge of describing these turns lies in doing justice to their unfixability—an unfixability that resists subsumption within a dialectical pattern. Apostrophe here is therefore not the means by which the inanimate, the dead, the abstract, or the absent are—however paradoxically—brought to life, spiritualized, or rendered available for communication with the transcendent. Rather, it enacts a turning toward an ever-singular other.

Matter as (the) Other

In “Materialism”, matter as the “only reality” appears as a form of non-sensuous certainty that cannot be proven but can only be believed in—or confessed or testified to before the other. If the speaker bears witness to faith in the “only reality” of matter before friends, this testimony concerns not only a vision but also faith in one’s own matter, in one’s own body as an ever-singular other. Unable to prove the vitality of matter, yet convinced of it, the speaker depends on persuasion—on poetic language that declares this faith, inscribes it, turns it outward—and on mortal friends as the other in each case. The relation between spirit and matter, soul and body, as well as between addresser and addressee, thus appears as a bond that may be placed in parallel with the relation between the immaterial and material dimensions of language. The speaker enters into an open yet secret alliance with matter, an alliance whose ratification or declaration must in turn be affirmed by another who is likewise real, material, and finite. In this non-dialectical event, the witness is not an external observer or a third party “overhearing” the address (an audience or reader), but an other who—or which—is different each time. Matter in the poem repeatedly becomes other, just as the addressee is always another other. Finite matter, like the mortal friend, is infinitely, absolutely other.

The otherness of matter—and the material, bodily, mortal character of the other—designates an irreducible absence, a secrecy that cannot be appropriated. Matter, as the life of the other and as life’s other, bears within itself a self-dividing movement that the poem names “suicide.” The poem erects a memorial to self-sacrificing matter as the other in each case, and in doing so recalls the rhetoric of elegy and religious poetry—for example, the *Halotti beszéd és könyörgés* (Funeral Sermon and Prayer), the late twelfth-century Christian funeral sermon preserved in the Pray Codex and the oldest continuous extant Hungarian-language text, at once the “mother” and the textual matter of Hungarian literary tradition. The *Funeral Sermon* likewise thematizes the finite, mortal nature of matter or the body. Its gesture of pointing to the grave appeals to visual certainty, reminding those present of their finitude and mortality: “You see, my brethren, with your eyes, what we are:

behold, we are dust and ashes”—as its opening runs in paraphrase.³⁰ Yet in the spirit of Christian faith, this threat is deflected by turning toward God, from the finite to the infinite. It is telling that whereas the version of the poem published in *Széphalom* in 1930 addresses God (“My God, how am I to believe in anything other / than matter?”), the earlier version—published in 1928 in *Pesti Napló* and later included in the volume *You and the World*—turns not to God, not to an infinite, timeless, immortal instance, but to mortals. It does so not merely to remind them that we were made of matter and will become matter again, but to bury, mourn, and memorialize matter itself as dead—and thereby to preserve the memory of matter that has always already been dead and yet “somewhere and somehow still lives.”

The other—matter—not only sustains life but also threatens it. “And all the rest, everything that exists,” “comes and comes toward me, to be consumed by my life”—this passage in the original (“jön-jön elem, hogy életem fölélje”) can also be read, given the grammatically suspended and underdetermined object of *fölélje* (“consume” or “use up”), as “comes and comes toward me, to consume my life.” In the poem, three further lines intervene between the activity of life—“comes and comes toward me, for my life to consume”—and “the benevolent and noble matter” that is ostensibly consumed. This deferred object unsettles the grammatical hierarchy. Life becomes the object, while matter—indeed “everything that exists”—assumes the position of subject. What initially appears as life’s consumption of matter can therefore equally be read as matter’s approach in order to consume life.

In this way, the line becomes a turning point: the emptying out and excretion of matter threatens to coincide with the emptying out of life itself, with life’s turning against itself and consuming itself. The fulfillment of self-preservation may coincide with self-destruction. The matter we exclude and expel is ourselves; in excluding it, we exclude ourselves, debase ourselves, abolish ourselves together with the very conditions of our existence. Whether life tends toward self-preservation or toward self-consumption—toward suicide—can scarcely be decided. For if “the suicide of matter is life,” and if there is no life, soul, or spirit without matter, then life is nothing other than continuous suicide—that is, survival. Matter, incessantly becoming other, at once living and dead, can bring death as much as life; it may shorten or prolong life, empty it out or bring it to fulfillment. What can be said of matter as other—or of the materiality of the other as the condition of life—amounts only to this: matter is always other, wholly other, arriving unpredictably and unforeseeably; it “comes and comes toward me.”

Accordingly, apostrophe is not merely the technique by which the absent is seemingly brought to life—through its “suicide”—but the technique of life itself, of

30 Halotti beszéd és könyörgés.

survival. To live, to survive, we must at every moment turn toward matter—that is, toward something wholly other and unknown. This turn both sustains and endangers life. In invoking the divine, the poem does not celebrate an eternal, infinite, undivided presence but, on the contrary, affirms the finitude of material existence.

Finitude is the human condition, inscribed from the outset in the mortal, material body. We are finite because we are bound to a perishable body from which spirit cannot be detached and the soul is not immortal. The finitude of the body constitutes an insurmountable limit: it separates us from ourselves, excludes us from ourselves. By virtue of this finitude, we are “thrown” into time and into the world. Yet “thrownness” would be misleading if it implied the loss of some original, self-identical interiority. We are always already exposed beyond ourselves, without an origin that would belong purely to us. The fate of mortals—the death or “suicide” of matter—cannot be avoided; life as the suicide of matter cannot be reversed. The more we attempt to evade matter, to detach or degrade it, the more exposed we become to it, and the more it threatens to consume and empty out life itself. That we can never be fully present to ourselves—that we depend upon matter, upon the body, upon the other—is not something to be overcome through a supposed return to what is “properly” our own. The technique of turning toward the other does not consist in turning back, in denying death, reversing it, or reanimating the dead. It consists in turning toward an unknown future, toward an arriving other—a risky turn, the risk inherent in turning itself.

This understanding of apostrophe casts a different light on the addresses to the other, for example, on those poems in *You and the World* in which—as another monographer of the poet has put it—“death materializes not merely as the opposite of life but as an indispensable component of the living body,”³¹ and in which both the “you” and the world appear as irreducible others of the self, simultaneously enclosed within the “I” and excluded from it. The other—whether matter, body, or instincts—appears at once as threat (e.g., “Célok és hasznok között” [“Between Aims and Utilities”], “Halálfélelem” [“Fear of Death”], “Majd” [“Later”], “Börtönök” [“Prisons”]) and as promise (e.g., “Évek” [“Years”], “Kíváncsiság” [“Curiosity”], “A belső végtelenben” [“In the Inner Infinite”], “Tovább” [“Further”]), or indeed as both at once, friend and enemy simultaneously (e.g., “Az Egy álmai” [“The Dreams of the One”], “Gyermeünk, a halál” [“Our Child, Death”], “A semmittevő halál” [“The Idle Death”]). In “Győztes vereség”³² (“Victorious Defeat”), for example, the speaker addresses his “senseless torment,” his “desire for death,” whose previously unassuageable pain is alleviated precisely through this turning toward it—without

31 Kulcsár-Szabó, *Tükörszínhátéka agyadnak*, 83.

32 Lőrinc, *Te meg a világ*, 23.

any attempt to reverse death's irreversible, internal work, the ongoing "suicide" of matter or body, the destruction always already at work within it:

"I could not root you out,
so now I watch your work,
worm, mad surgeon, you who
never rest within my soul:
you destroy, yet do not hurt: you interest me."

One of the closest, though less radical counterparts to "Materialism" within the volume is "Testem"³³ ("My Body"), in which the speaker addresses and pities the body as a selfless other:

"My body, gentle,
my exploited animal, poor thing,
whom even I pursue,
among so many strangers
who is to pity you, at times, if not I?"

"For Nothing, Entirely"

Another counterpart to "Materialism" is the poem "Semmiért Egészen"³⁴ ("For Nothing, Entirely"), which stages the impossible conditions of turning toward the other. Through apostrophic address, the addressee is not summoned to life; on the contrary, it is called upon to become "like a thing," "dead and without will"—like selfless, self-sacrificing, "suicidal" matter that relinquishes itself without selfhood:

For Nothing, Entirely

I admit it is terrible,
yet it is true.
If you love, let your life be
suicide, or almost that.
What do I care what the moderns
or the law demand;
inside, one is one's own master,

33 Lőrinc, *Te meg a világ*, 24.

34 Lőrinc, *Te meg a világ*, 104.

outside, a captive,
and I cannot feel joy except
by my own law.

You are not mine as long as you are your own:
you do not yet love.
So long as, in return, you want to make
me your own, you may be a burden.
A bargain, even if sacred, is a bargain; I
require something else now: For Nothing, Entirely!
A secret duel of two selfishnesses
is everything else;
I ask more: that you
become a component of my fate.

I fear everyone, I am ill
and weary;
I desire you even so, perhaps,
but my faith long ago abandoned me.
To still every shuddering suspicion
I can do nothing else now:
show me the joy of complete humility
and sacrifice,
and that, for my sake,
you are the world's opposite.

For so long as you still need a single solitary minute,
apart, for yourself,
so long as you dare think of yourself,
so long as you withhold your life,
so long as you are not, like a thing,
dead and without will:
until then you are no better,

no more than the others,
 until then you might as well be a stranger,
 until then you have nothing to do with me.

One protected by the law
 may still be good as a neighbor;
 outside the law, like an animal,
 be such that I love you.
 Like a lamp, once I unscrew it,
 do not live when I do not will it;
 do not speak, do not cry, do not see
 this indissoluble prison;
 and I will carry it out within myself—
 that you forgive my tyranny.³⁵

Here, then, the aim of apostrophe is the reverse of the earlier definitions: not to animate the addressee, but to render it *as if dead*, to reduce it to a state of *living death*—as though it were to become the speaker's other precisely in this way.

As persuasive readings of the poem have shown,³⁶ what takes place here becomes accessible only if we read it not in terms of anthropological properties but as the staging of opposed functions constitutive of language—more precisely, of address itself. Such a reading opens the way to questions such as how the poem rewrites the codes of love lyric or, indeed, unsettles the very conditions of apostrophe. The oppositions of asymmetry and symmetry, one-sidedness and reciprocity, unconditionality and conditionality, irreplaceability and replaceability, self-will or arbitrariness and normativity function in the poem at once as poetic and as interpersonal (rather than anthropological) relations of interpretation. The limits of an anthropological mode of reading are signaled in several ways, for example by the instability of the oppositions between I and you, and between exterior and interior. The condition for the fulfillment of love is not the union of I and you, their fusion or dissolution into one, but the immediacy or *unconditionality* of their relation. For this condition to be met, the poem—in keeping with a late modern conception of language—must not efface but preserve, while at the same time rendering groundless, the difference between I and you.

35 The poem has been translated into English by Edwin Morgan under the title *All for Nothing*. Also, a more recent translation of the poem by Katalin N. Ullrich is available online. For reasons of philological precision, I provide here a literal prose rendering of the Hungarian original.

36 Kulcsár Szabó, "A »szerelmi« líra vége," 46–65; Lőrincz, "Líra, kód, intimitás," 102–3.

This difference may in turn be understood as analogous to the relation between the material and immaterial dimensions of language. The theme of love enables the poem to reexamine the imperative of *unconditional* turning toward the other and the *impossibility* inherent in it. The idea of “true” love is inseparable from expectations of reciprocity and unconditionality, which, as the poem shows, cannot be reconciled. The ideal of reciprocity presupposes the equality of the parties, and this in turn entails the intervention of laws and norms that standardize them. Although love may be “sanctified” by the legal institution of marriage, “A bargain, even if sacred, is a bargain; I / require something else now: For Nothing, Entirely!” Unconditionality thus excludes reciprocity, which binds the *selfless gift* of love to a condition. “Terrible,” yet “true”: “true” love would have to be wholly selfless, “almost” “suicide.” Unconditional love, which gives itself “entirely” to the other, expects nothing—or only “Nothing”—in return. Accordingly, the condition of love, of the “true” relation between I and you, is not symmetry or equality but one-sidedness or asymmetry. Only such a relation—apparently unjust and hierarchical at first glance, yet in fact precarious because *reversible at any moment*—can preserve the difference between I and you and thus the *irreducible alterity of the other*. At the same time, this imperative concerns not only linguistic events but also interpersonal relations, though not in an anthropological sense. Rather, it concerns our *relation without relation* to the other in each case: an unconditional must—akin to what, with Derrida, we identified as the “must” of address or prosopopeia, the imperative to exceed or interrupt tropological specularity. Let us now consider how the poem stages both the impossibility of stepping outside tropological language and the imperative of breaking the economy of reflection.

The unconditionality of love—and with it the asymmetrical conditions under which the I and the you cease to be self-identical and become other, turned toward the other—is first produced, at the level of meaning, through the arbitrary, “tyrannical” positing of hierarchical oppositions by means of imperatives. The I seeks to oppose its own self-consciousness and tyranny to the other’s unconsciousness, to a state of unconscious captivity. Yet the specular structures of language reverse these oppositions: just as the most extreme materialism can exchange places with spiritualism, so the greatest arbitrariness can exchange places with the greatest exposure, the most subordinated position with the highest instance—without any dialectical resolution; the tension between them persists. As Ernő Kulcsár Szabó has shown, the inseparability of substitution and unstitutability, as well as of symmetry and asymmetry, remains operative even in the closing lines (“and I will carry it out within myself—/ that you forgive my tyranny”), where—with the promise of an impossible exchange, a forgiveness performed in place of the other—the latter would seem to prevail over the former. “For while the »indissoluble,« tomb-like prison can be

identified only with the lower, disenfranchised space of being outside the law, the act of forgiveness beyond the law can be the *prerogative* only of a privileged person who occupies a position exclusively *above* the law. [...] Their respective positions within the sphere of intimacy thus cannot merge into one, yet they always become exchangeable. Which means that this exchange, here and now, protects the identity of the other in each case from a destructive romantic fusion.³⁷ The aim, then, is not the erasure of difference but its preservation. This difference is not merely inscriptive or empty—the formal condition of possible substitutions—but also the *placeless place of the other's alterity*, a mode of being—more precisely, a not-yet-being—that differs from itself, spatializes itself, and is at once spatial and temporal, akin to the alterity and unknowability of what is to come, of the future.

In this poem, language—or rather address itself—works against itself.³⁸ The attempt to articulate the demand for unconditional love in the vocabulary of conditionality, law, economy, and politics already signals both the impossibility of the demand and its unconditional character: what has no possibility has no condition. At the same time, it reveals the inevitable contamination of the inner, lawless, arbitrary, and free sphere by the laws of the external world. Love, as distinct from attachment in a more general sense (even to inanimate or abstract entities), is interpersonal—more precisely, an event directed toward the singular other—that occurs *involuntarily* rather than under conditions and thus cannot be coerced. In Hungarian, this distinction is lexically marked: *szerelem* denotes romantic or erotic love between persons, whereas *szeretet* designates a broader form of affection or attachment that may also extend to things, ideas, or abstractions. Although the two terms can overlap in usage and at times function almost synonymously, their difference remains semantically operative and can become significant. The poem leaves this distinction unresolved and thus remains within the broader field of love as unconditional affirmation. Yet this unconditionality does not abolish the problem of condition; rather, it relocates it. The condition no longer concerns the other but the structure of the self. For the condition of the speaker's love for the addressee lies in the *speaker's willing* that love assume an asymmetrical form—a demand that does not bind the other but reflexively binds the self, enforcing itself upon itself as a form of violence committed against one's own perspective. The demand to be such that I love you does not mean that I want you to be this or that. The will is directed not at the other but at one's own mode of seeing. It means: I must see you as you would have to appear for love to occur. Thus, I must first subject myself to myself, to my

37 Kulcsár Szabó, "A »szerelmi« líra vége," 60.

38 More precisely, not only in this poem, but always already, address works against itself. On the reasons for this and on its consequences for the self-addressing poem type, see Kulcsár-Szabó, "Önmegszólítás," 180–99.

own will; I must carry it out within myself so that I may see you as I want to see you. The same paradox holds for romantic love: one cannot will oneself into falling in love, yet the will may prepare the conditions for the event—even though it cannot guarantee its occurrence. This structural tension becomes even more acute in the case of affirming the other. We will see later what this implies for the reading—or affirmation—of the text itself.

The demand for unconditionality depends not only on an “inner” act of will but also on external conditions—on the repeatable, substitutive, and equalizing language of law and economy—whose logic the speaker seeks precisely to *suspend* in order to keep the private sphere apart from the public one. From this perspective, however, the interior is always already exterior. The properties of self-consciousness, arbitrariness, self-mastery, and reflexivity enclose the I within symmetrical structures that duplicate themselves. They close the self upon itself and at the same time exclude it from itself, expelling it from what appears to be its own free, arbitrary, extra-legal domain and reinscribing it within the dimension of interchangeable dualities, within the external order of law, equivalence, and exchange. In this sense, the self finds itself outside itself precisely by entering the sphere of reversible oppositions—into the very regime of external legislation it seeks to escape. It is therefore always already outside itself, already exposed to that dimension. The imperative therefore seeks to suspend this symmetry that governs both self and other—the specular logic of self-consciousness: “so long as you dare think of yourself.” So long as you remain conscious of yourself, enclosed within reflexivity and withdrawn from me—so long as we are “A secret duel of two selfishnesses,” so long as you are like me—“until then you are no better, / no more than the others”: interchangeable, indistinguishable. Nothing differentiates you.

It appears, then, as though the symmetry of self-consciousness could be broken only by asymmetry—by unconsciousness, or by a blindness both to oneself and to the other (“do not speak, do not cry, do not see / this indissoluble prison”). That the speaker is aware of the impossibility of this demand is suggested by the fact that the suspension of the law of equality is conceived only as *provisional*. The repeated comparative constructions—“like a thing,” “like an animal”—as well as the qualifying addition “or almost” (“let your life be / suicide, or almost that”) are significant. The I does not call for a total metamorphosis, for a literal transformation into a thing, an animal, or a corpse, but for a becoming-like—a similarity that remains evental and never fully realized. To be *as though dead* would be to become the other’s finitude, its end, its alterity. The comparative form seems to preserve the difference between essence and attribute, and between “bare” life and a life subjected to will or law—just as the imperative “do not live when I do not will it,” would suspend

life only temporarily, only for the duration determined by will.³⁹ But life—and loving—appear here less as inaccessible essences than as events marked by asymmetry, irreversibility, and one-directionality. One might say that “bare” life is life differentiated from itself. The activity of life as other—as living-dead matter—is what simultaneously encloses and excludes the I, separating it from itself. By allowing mutually exclusive opposites—captivity and tyranny—to turn into one another, the poem divides what appears to be the indivisible unity of “bare” life, introducing difference where unity had seemed to prevail.

How, then, does this poem stage the conditions of apostrophe as a turning toward the absolute other? This apostrophe cannot simply be read (in Schlaffer’s sense) as a speech act—that is, as the interior monologue of a self-present consciousness rendered visible in the scene of turning-away and turning-toward, of which the reader would be merely the witness. If we nevertheless read it in this way, we align ourselves with those from whom the speaker not only turns away but explicitly excludes from the private, interior space declared immune to their judgment: “What do I care what the moderns / or the law demand”. This enclosed space—the “prison” of I and you—is sad to be “indissoluble,” yet it begins to dissolve precisely as it becomes invisible (“do not speak, do not cry, do not see / this indissoluble prison”). The turning-away both institutes and destabilizes this space, within which the figures of apostrophe are at once enclosed and excluded.

It is as though this apostrophe required no witnesses beyond the addressee, as though everyone else were a false witness, a misreader of the address. Hence the speaker urges the you to turn away from others and to show yourself opposed to the world: “show me the joy of complete humility / and sacrifice, / and that, for my sake, / you are the world’s opposite.” At first glance, it appears as though the inner law, arbitrariness, or will stood opposed, as a timeless truth, to the historically mutable law of the “moderns,” a law that becomes void at the moment of its birth and consumes itself. Yet this opposition between the timeless and the temporal, the inner and the outer, the arbitrary and the lawful, is unsettled by the insurmountable boundary between the *not-yet* and the *perhaps-to-come*. The postponement of love’s condition—its unconditionality—into the future displaces the apparent timelessness of the inner into a future that now appears impossible. So long as you are not what you would have to be in order to love (and be loved), “until then you are no better, / no more than the others,” you remain like the others, selfish like everyone else, like me. The “terrible,” “true” law or arbitrariness is not yet in force so long as the formulated conditions remain unfulfilled. With this turn, every figure of the apostrophe—the you, the I, and the others—finds itself on this side of the threshold,

39 For a biopolitical reading of this line, and for an account of the resistance of “bare life” within the poem, see Balogh, “Élni annyi, mint ellenállni,” 29–42.

in the state of the not-yet. This threshold could be crossed only through the fulfillment of the conditions—indeed, through the abolition of condition as such—*eventfully and without spectacle*.

From the moment the speaker speaks—more precisely, inscribes and declares the will—the self is divided and already outside itself. To read the poem instead as the discourse of a subject present to itself is to overlook that what is at stake is not an oral or theatrical performance but a text which, presented as a singular and therefore arbitrary law, implicates its reader in the execution and repetition of that law. As reader, one becomes the agent of the very will one might wish merely to observe—a process that can result in what has been described as the “permanent ‘visibility’ of the ‘voice,’ its observability by the text.”⁴⁰ The law already speaks in our name, and we in its. In reading, we find ourselves at once inside and outside the duality produced by the turning-away and turning-toward of apostrophe, and the same holds for the speaker of the text. The supposedly inner, private, secret sphere of will or arbitrariness cannot remain purely interior or self-identical, for this law—like any worldly law—must be declared, shared, and inscribed. The will (“my own law”) must appear; it must leave a trace in the world. In doing so, it enters precisely the public, economic, exchange-based order of external language and law that it seeks to suspend—the order that presupposes equality and substitutability, and within which both addresser and addressee emerge.

The absolutely singular inner law thus becomes external law at the very moment of address—of utterance, or more precisely, of inscription. It must first exclude itself from itself in order to refer to itself. Address is therefore always already inscription, trace, self-exteriorization—an internal division not preceded by any intact, purely interior will or monologue that the reader could simply overhear. Because consciousness itself is linguistically structured as a trace that divides and never coincides with itself, we are already outside ourselves before we could turn either toward ourselves or toward the other. The inner sphere of self-hearing speech or reflection is always already divided—for instance, into “actor” and “spectator”—but not in the sense of a theatrical “inner dialogue”⁴¹ that could be observed as a drama of captive and tyrant. This interiority is already exterior. The I is excluded from itself precisely because it is enclosed within itself without any external point of reference, trapped in the specular duplications generated by language, consciousness, or—frequently, in Lőrinc Szabó’s recurring use of the term—by the “brain.”

The simultaneity of enclosure within and exclusion from oneself is not a loss but the very condition of an unconditional turning toward the other. Accordingly,

40 Lőrincz, “Líra, kód, intimitás,” 104.

41 Kabdebó, *Szabó Lőrinc pályaképe*.

the speaker's demands do not aim at a return to some timeless interior origin, nor at a mere confrontation with the addressee, but at an unconditional turn from the "not yet" toward the "then," toward what is to come. The self-canceling condition may be formulated thus: so long as you impose conditions—upon me, upon yourself, upon the future, upon the arrival of something wholly other; so long as you are not a component of my fate, my finitude—you do not love. And not to love means: not to allow what comes to approach you unconditionally.

If one reads the impossibility of an unconditional turning toward the other in light of "Materialism," one could say that in this poem the impossible relation—indeed the relation without relation—between I and other, their "love," names the alliance that elsewhere in the volume must be forged with matter, with the body as the unknown, secret other that both inhabits us and sustains us. Matter/other/you thus becomes that to which one would have to commit oneself unconditionally. "For Nothing, Entirely" renders this relation more complex than "My Body," not least because it places the relation between the "tyrannical" spirit and the "humble" body within the framework of erotic lyric, making it legible as an interpersonal relation as well. This displacement reveals not only that one's own body or matter is foreign to oneself, but that this matter "somewhere and somehow still lives": in our own otherness, in our body, the spirit of the other haunts us, or is buried within us in an inaccessible, "indissoluble prison," a crypt or tomb. We always already carry within ourselves the other's signature; the other signs us. The other is separated from us—and within us—by an insurmountable boundary akin to our own finitude. From the outset, the other is for us *as if dead, because its self-enclosed, cryptic consciousness cannot be returned to language, just as death cannot be reversed.*

What matters here above all is that both poems expose the contradictory implications inherent in poetic address without exhausting themselves in the mere staging of its impossibility. One *must* turn toward matter and toward the other precisely because such a turning is impossible. This irreversible and asymmetrical turn must occur at every moment in a life understood as the suicide of matter—even if it lacks any condition of possibility. That more is at stake here than the demonstration of impossibility—of being locked within language, of the inescapability of tropological structures—is signaled by the fact that concepts such as "truth," "law," and "life" are not merely "deconstructed," consumed, or emptied. They differentiate themselves within the poem and thereby, as it were, survive their own "suicide." While the life invoked by apostrophe culminates in its own self-consumption and emptying out, life understood as the suicide of matter is survival. It not only undoes—and only *retrospectively* empties—the concept of life, but divides it from itself and turns it toward its own other, its death, its end. Matter's "otherworldly self-sacrifice" and

love's "almost" "suicide" do not dissolve into spirit, do not become immaterial.⁴² They remain thoroughly material and finite survival—another life, or the life of the other. Against the dialectical, symmetrical pattern of I and other that ultimately consumes itself by absorbing and erasing the irreplaceable singularity of each, "Materialism" sets the finite life of matter: a definition of life that serves (sur)life precisely through its irreversible enclosure within itself and its irreversible exclusion from itself—through its "suicide."

In the final lines of "For Nothing, Entirely," a comparable movement occurs: the I does not wholly consume the other but turns toward the other as toward an alien component of its own unpredictable fate—an instance capable of dispelling "shuddering suspicion," that is, of loosening consciousness from itself, relieving it of tyranny, and undoing its specular self-enclosure, its compulsive turning back upon itself. For the origin of the guilt of tyranny—more precisely, of its bad conscience—lies not in any external deed (no transgression, no accusation), but in an inner *speculation* or, as an earlier version of the poem, "Nem nyúlok hozzád, csak nézem, hogy alszol" ("I Do Not Touch You, I Only Watch You Sleep"), suggests, in the self-enclosed, companionless structure of self-consciousness or "selfishness":

"[...] It should by now
ease within me, this sad
and distrustful, eternal solitude,
but I fear everyone for my own sake,
for my freedom; I cannot feel joy
without reservation, and thus
from selfishness is born guilt.
[...]"

As Nietzsche shows in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, in tracing the emergence of guilt and bad conscience, one extreme manifestation—indeed one origin—of self-consciousness is inward-turned, self-tormenting guilt,⁴³ while another is

42 Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó has shown in his monograph, with regard to the grounding of the poetic subject and its resistance to fixation within binary oppositions, that in *You and the World* the categories of "beyond" (*túlvilág*) and "other world" (*másvilág*) do not function as a transcendence of, or compensation for, the body's enclosure or insurmountable finitude: "The beyond and the other world are simultaneously »outside« and »inside«; this motif, which on the one hand implies the sphere of hallucinatory sensuousness and on the other precisely the absence of external sensuous reality, does not ground the autonomy of the individual in a difference separating the inner universe of consciousness from the sensory, external side of the I." Kulcsár-Szabó, *Tükörszínhátéka agyadnak*, 79.

43 Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 356.

sovereign self-mastery or self-legislation as domination over oneself;⁴⁴ each is inseparable from the other. Consciousness is thus, by virtue of its specular, self-duplicating structure, always already “tyrannical”: it subjugates and governs itself, at once its own tyrant and its own captive. With the poem “Embertelen”⁴⁵ (Inhuman), one might say that the drama of captivity and tyranny is a “mirror-play” of the I’s “brain”: a hallucinatory structure that encloses itself within itself. Bad conscience resembles suspicion: once it arises, it cannot be dispelled from within the “brain,” which “keeps silent and looks inward.” What must be interrupted is precisely this hallucinatory specularity—the specular structure of the “linguistic predicament”—through an apostrophic turn in which the other is not merely a hallucination or projection of the I’s consciousness or language. Tyranny can be forgiven only by an other (or the I’s other) who lacks self-reflexive closure, who does not turn back upon itself, who lives buried or inscribed within the I *as matter within spirit or as death within life*. It is therefore not unwarranted to relate this other of the I to that other whose incessant becoming-other—whose self-difference or non-coincidence with itself, that is, whose finitude—we uncovered in the “matter” of “Materialism.”

“And I will carry it out within myself— / that you forgive my tyranny”: on closer consideration, the forgiveness of tyranny—the work or task of forgiveness—can indeed be carried out only within the I. For if the addressee fulfills the I’s demands—if the addressee does not see the prison as prison, nor tyranny as tyranny—then there is nothing to forgive, and the I’s promise becomes superfluous. The object of the demand, the entirety of the you—its selfless, unconditional gift—is nothing other than itself: its own self-giving. In the becoming-entire of this whole, in its fulfillment, the gift must not separate from the giver; the loving party must not become self-conscious, must not divide or communicate itself (“do not speak, do not cry, do not see”). Were such self-unconsciousness realized, the labor of forgiveness that dissolves guilty consciousness would become unnecessary—the very labor the I claims it would undertake in response to the other’s selflessness. From this perspective, the promise—the forgiveness—is already accomplished in the fulfillment of the demand itself; it is redeemed in the becoming-entire of the whole. It therefore has no exchange value. And thus the I, which declares that it now requires “For Nothing, Entirely!”, gives nothing in return—for the other, for the whole, for the fulfillment of the demand.

The capitalization transforms the parties of this impossible contract into proper names. In Hungarian, common nouns are not capitalized, even in titles; the elevation of *Semmiért* and *Egészen* to initial capitals thus departs from orthographic

44 Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 293–94.

45 Lőrincz, *Te meg a világ*, 110.

convention and is therefore marked and meaningful. “Entirely” appears to designate the you, “For Nothing” the I: the I receives the “Entirely” for the “Nothing” it promises. Yet the positions are reversible, for this act of naming may equally signify the nullity of the I and the plenitude of the you. “For Nothing, Entirely!”—raised to the title and thus to the status of name, signature, or heading of the poem as a quasi-contractual text—is at once a demand and a promise, and the latter may at any moment turn into a threat.

Why, beyond the demand, is a promise also required? Perhaps because the direction of a demand is *reversible*—as it indeed becomes in this poem, turning not only toward the you but even more toward the I, toward its own mode of seeing—whereas a promise, strictly speaking, *cannot be addressed to oneself* but only to an other (or to a future, other self), since it requires exteriorization and witness. A promise must leave a trace outside itself; it must show itself to the other or to the world. It cannot merely turn inward or back upon itself. It must turn toward the other and, in doing so, differentiate itself from itself. As Nietzsche argues in the *Genealogy of Morality*, in his analysis of the seemingly impossible conditions under which a creditor and a debtor can bind themselves to one another, the promise—constitutive of the sovereign individual and of subjectivity as such—possesses a *contractual*⁴⁶ structure distinct from mere command or demand. Yet this contractuality is not to be understood as a speech act whose fulfillment would be secured by external conventions (such as a juridical signature). Although pursuing this comparison would exceed the limits of the present study, one could show that the conclusion of the apparently unjust contract described in the texts of Nietzsche and Lőrinc Szabó amounts to an unconditional affirmation of the other—of the kind Derrida analyzes, albeit in a less scandalous register, whose discursive differences would themselves require further examination.

This affinity may at first appear surprising, yet it is already inscribed in the poem itself. The logic of the promise articulated by the I could be rendered as follows: once you become as I want to see you—once, that is, I “carry it out within myself” my own demand—then “I will carry it out within myself—/ that you forgive my tyranny.” I promise that if I execute my demand within myself and alter the way I see you—if I become the one who is capable of loving—then I will become other to myself, my own other; and in that displacement, forgiveness will occur: you forgive me, I forgive myself. This simultaneously secret and public commitment could be formulated more generally: *I promise to remain unconditionally open to whatever—or whoever—comes*. The declaration of love does not promise a feeling; it binds itself to the to-come, which as such is absolutely other.

46 Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 298.

The future execution of forgiveness—and with it the future as such—functions both as promise and as threat: as fulfillment, completion, becoming-whole, and at the same time as possible ending. The ambiguity is intensified by the Hungarian verb *elvégezem*, rendered here as “carry it out.” The verb derives from *vég* (“end”) and thus signifies not only the accomplishment of a task but also its completion in the sense of bringing something to an end. In this etymological resonance, to “carry out” forgiveness is at once to fulfill it and potentially to terminate something through it. The same root (*vég*) underlies the adjective *véges* (“finite”), corresponding to the English “finite,” itself derived from the Latin *finis* (“end”). The act of “carrying out” thus becomes decisive: upon it turns the relation between a finite I and a finite you whose reciprocity threatens to mirror itself without limit. The promise of fulfillment and the intimation of ending are inseparable. It is precisely this doubleness that exposes the precarious structure of their relation.

With this, we return to the question of Derrida’s interruption of de Manian prosopopeia. The finitude of the other—of matter, or of the material trace—clarifies the difference between Derrida’s thinking of *différance* and de Man’s conception of the rhetoric of tropes, and thus between their respective accounts of apostrophe. As noted earlier, de Manian prosopopeia constitutes a specular structure in which dualities mirror and exchange themselves without end. From the structural predicament generated by this mechanism—the threatening experience of the groundlessness of self-identity—any appeal to an apparently external authority or convention (for instance, the conferral of a name by signature) offers only an illusory escape. Such an intervention merely repeats the arbitrary positing of prosopopeia, since it too performs an address and a turn. Through the arbitrary donation of a sensible name and face—arbitrary because no sensible relation binds it to the addressee—prosopopeia both enables the exchange of properties and appears to arrest it. The gift of a name, the signature, thus functions at once as promise and as threat.

Where de Man discerns in this gesture the arbitrariness of execution or completion and the apparent closure of turns and exchanges by means of a third instance—an end to tropological language—Derrida instead emphasizes the finitude of specular structures, their inability to close upon themselves, their necessary turning toward and affirmation of the other. For de Man, the inaccessible and self-erasing origin of prosopopeia lies in an initial arbitrary positing, while its end is sought in an arbitrariness positioned outside tropological language. For Derrida, by contrast, what precedes and exceeds the rhetoric of tropes—what cannot be programmed or fully formalized within language—is the finitude of the other, the trace or signature left in me. Only in the mirror of the other’s finitude, secrecy, or—following de Man—unreadability can I become myself; and for that very reason I can never simply be myself, never remain enclosed within myself.

What apostrophe turns toward, by turning us away from ourselves, is something that language—understood as *prosopopeia*—renders accessible only by depriving us of it: consciousness, will, and such seemingly purely interior, immaterial events as guilt, repentance, forgiveness, or love. Yet these must leave a material trace; they can occur only through a finite other who inscribes them within us. The same holds for time—more precisely, for the experience of temporal passage as irreversible loss, indeed as life itself: the threat and promise of the unknown future, and of the ever-singular other. The condition of turning toward this secret interior/exterior other is the performance of an impossible, solitary labor—mourning, love, forgiveness. Because these are impossible within a language and consciousness sealed within themselves, they are, in that sense, unperformable; and for that very reason, they can only be performed by the other in our name, within us—by the one who can never remain simply ourselves. “And I will carry it out within myself—/ that you forgive my tyranny”: although the performance of this act—at once absolutely interior and absolutely exterior—appears impossible, it is precisely what takes place in every moment of life that suspends itself, that steps outside the law.

In conclusion, one may return to the—viewed in light of the insurmountability of tropological language—dangerously simplifying question: who, then, is the witness? who is the other? who forgives? Such questions risk undermining the rigor and internal consistency of a strictly poetic reading, for any answer appears to require recourse to a metaphysical instance *beyond* language. In a sense, *this recourse is unavoidable*. Yet because consciousness, language, and text are always already *outside* themselves, never simply self-contained, it cannot be determined where speculation begins. Reading is speculative; so too is the consciousness of tyranny. Conscience—the knowledge of one’s own soul, the soul’s supposed transparency to itself—is incommunicable and opaque to any finite other. One cannot hide from oneself, from the internal witness; a single “wrong” thought may suffice to awaken conscience. No finite other can see into one’s consciousness. Such access would require an instance not bound by finitude—conscience itself, or God. The solitary, self-enclosed consciousness thus finds its most “ideal,” even “spiritual,” interlocutor in God: the absolutely present witness of a self-presence that would appear to overcome the finitude and division of both self and other, that would see into the soul and know its guilt as conscience does. Forgiveness, too, seems to demand such a figure. From the standpoint of a finite other, forgiveness is an impossible interior act. For a human being to forgive sins would require either their complete erasure or oblivion, or—no less impossibly—their radical reinterpretation, their placement in an absolutely other light, perhaps even their unconscious misrecognition. The impossibility of forgiveness is thus resolved by invoking God as witness. God functions as the metaphysical, infinite, immaterial instance capable of restoring what

consciousness divides in its inward turn: the rift between inner and outer, thought and expression, I and I, I and you, sign and meaning.

As we have seen, in Lőrinc Szabó there is no God; or rather, *the other*—the suicidal, finite matter—is *God*. The consciousness of tyranny is therefore speculation: the illusion of self-reflection, of an I that hears itself speak, of a consciousness present to itself and turned inward. Interpretations that read the poem as the confession of such a self-present consciousness, as the expression of guilt over tyranny, cannot absolve the speaker of selfishness even if they wish to. They cannot perform forgiveness, and for that reason, they cannot occupy the position of the addressee. They remain merely “modern” readers, whose judgment is indifferent and interchangeable with any other. At the same time, we have seen that the speaker is likewise displaced from the self. The speaker—or (under)signer—is at once the misreader of the self, speculating without access to the interiority in question, to the secret that cannot remain purely one’s own. Yet from the moment speech—or more precisely, writing—takes place, this secret can no longer remain purely interior: it is always already turned outward, exteriorized, exposed to others.

If something like forgiveness can occur, it does not consist in a divine, metaphysical, or readerly resolution of divided consciousness, but in the loosening of the (readerly or textual) I from itself by a finite other—in its *différance* from itself, in its becoming-other to itself, in the inscribed exposure and sharing of its arbitrariness or secret. For this reason, it is not enough to read or recite the poem in order to turn toward it; one must also sign it. It is impossible to turn unconditionally toward the other, and yet one must will it even while knowing that it is impossible. And if such a turn nonetheless sometimes occurs, then one cannot but forgive, love, affirm, sign—exposing oneself, one’s own arbitrary law or reading, to the other, to the reader to come.

Sources

- Halotti beszéd és könyörgés* [Funeral Sermon and Prayer]. In *Sermones*, edited by ELTE BTK. https://sermones.elte.hu/szovegkiadasok/magyarul/madasszgy/index.php?file=312_320_Halotti_beszed. (accessed 17 February 2026).
- Szabó, Lőrinc. *Harc az ünnepért* [Struggle for the Feast]. Kecskemét: Bartha Miklós Társaság, 1938. <https://krk.szabolorinc.hu/>. (accessed 18 February 2026).
- Szabó, Lőrinc. “Materializmus.” *Széphalom* 4 (1930): 269–70. https://acta.bibl.u-szeged.hu/20545/1/szephalom_004_269-270.pdf. (accessed 17 February 2026).
- Szabó, Lőrinc. *Te meg a világ* [You and the World]. Budapest: Pantheon, 1932. <https://krk.szabolorinc.hu/05/06.htm>. (accessed 17 February 2026).
- Szabó, Lőrinc. “Semmiért Egészen” [For Nothing, Entirely]. English translation by Katalin N. Ullrich. <https://www.magyarulbabelben.net/works/hu/>

Szab%C3%B3_L%C5%91rinc-1900/Semmi%C3%A9rt_eg%C3%A9szen/en/25617-Entirely_And_For_Nothing. (accessed 18 February 2026).

Literature

- Bakó, Endre. “Az anyag mítosza: Szabó Lőrinc *Materializmus* című versének olvasata” [The Myth of Matter: A Reading of Lőrinc Szabó’s “Materializmus”]. *Alföld* 73, no. 1 (2022): 74–80.
- Balogh, Gergő. “Élni annyi, mint ellenállni. Élet és szuverenitás Szabó Lőrinc *Semmiért Egészen* című versében” [To Live Is to Resist: Life and Sovereignty in Lőrinc Szabó’s “Semmiért Egészen”]. *Irodalomtörténet* 99, no. 1 (2018): 29–42.
- Bónus, Tibor. *Élő halál: Gyász, hagyaték és túlélet József Attilánál* [Living Death: Mourning, Legacy, and Survival in Attila József]. Budapest: Kortárs, 2024.
- Chase, Cynthia. “Giving a Face to a Name: De Man’s Figures.” In *Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition*, 82–109. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.
- Culler, Jonathan. “Apostrophe.” *Diacritics* 7, no. 4 (1977): 59–69. <https://doi.org/10.2307/464857>
- Culler, Jonathan. *Theory of the Lyric*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674425781>
- de Man, Paul. “Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric.” In *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 239–62. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- de Man, Paul. “Autobiography as De-facement.” In *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 67–81. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- de Man, Paul. “Hegel on the Sublime.” In *Aesthetic Ideology*, edited by Andrzej Warminski, 105–16. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- de Man, Paul. “Hypogram and Inscription.” In *The Resistance to Theory*, 27–53. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- de Man, Paul. “Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s Aesthetics.” In *Aesthetic Ideology*, edited by Andrzej Warminski, 91–104. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Derrida, Jacques. “Mnemosyne.” In *Memoires for Paul de Man*, translated by Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf, 1–43. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Hamacher, Werner. “LECTIO: de Man’s Imperative.” Translated by Susan Bernstein. In *Reading de Man Reading*, edited by Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich, 171–201. *Theory and History of Literature* 59. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Hamacher, Werner. “The Second of Inversion: Movements of a Figure through Celan’s Poetry.” In *Premises: Essays on Philosophy and Literature from Kant to*

- Celan, translated by Peter Fenves, 222–63. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Kabdebó, Lóránt. “A vers kriminalizálódása Szabó Lőrinc pályakezdésében (1920–1930)” [The Criminalization of the Poem in Lőrinc Szabó’s Early Career (1920–1930)]. In *Valami történt. Szabó Lőrinc átváltozásai*, 34–99. Budapest: Prae, 2022.
- Kabdebó, Lóránt. *Szabó Lőrinc pályaképe* [Lőrinc Szabó: A Literary Portrait]. Budapest: Osiris, 2001. https://reader.dia.hu/document/Kabdebo_Lorant-Szabo_Lorinc_palyakepe-8474. (accessed 18 February 2026).
- Kulcsár Szabó, Ernő. “A »szerelmi« líra vége. »Igazságosság« és intimitás kódolása a késő modern költészetben” [The End of “Love” Lyric: The Coding of “Justice” and Intimacy in Late Modern Poetry]. *Alföld* 56, no. 2 (2005): 46–65.
- Kulcsár-Szabó, Zoltán. “Narratíva, hazugság, kérdezés: A referenciális autoritás határai” [Narrative, Lie, Questioning: The Limits of Referential Authority]. In *Tetten érhetetlen szavak: Nyelv és történelem Paul de Mannál* [How to Undo Things with Words: Language and History in Paul de Man], 315–54. Budapest: Ráció, 2007.
- Kulcsár-Szabó, Zoltán. *Boldogtalan beszédaktusok: Tetten érhetetlen szavak 2* [Unhappy Speech Acts: How to Undo Things with Words 2]. Budapest: Ráció – Szépirodalmi Figyelő Alapítvány, 2024.
- Kulcsár-Szabó, Zoltán. “Önmegszólítás” [Self-Address]. In *Boldogtalan beszédaktusok: Tetten érhetetlen szavak 2*, 180–99. Budapest: Ráció – Szépirodalmi Figyelő Alapítvány, 2024.
- Kulcsár-Szabó, Zoltán. *Tükörszínjátéka agyadnak. Poétikai problémák Szabó Lőrinc költészetében* [The Mirror-Play of Your Brain: Poetic Problems in the Poetry of Lőrinc Szabó]. Budapest: Ráció, 2010.
- Lőrincz, Csongor. “Líra, kód, intimitás. A szerelmi költészet néhány kérdése Adynál és Szabó Lőrincnél” [Lyric, Code, Intimacy: Some Questions of Love Poetry in Ady and Lőrinc Szabó]. In *A költészet konstellációi. Adalékok a modern líra történetéhez és elméletéhez* [Constellations of Poetry: Contributions to the History and Theory of Modern Lyric], 85–104. Budapest: Ráció, 2007.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Zur Genealogie der Moral*. In *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, vol. 5, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 245–412. Munich and Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980.
- Schlaffer, Heinz. *Geistersprache. Zweck und Mittel der Lyrik*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 2015.

