

# Exhaustion and Recycling

## The Figures of the Danaids in Babits, Nietzsche, Freud, and Proust

Attila Simon 

Department of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, Múzeum krt. 4/A, 1088 Budapest, Hungary; [simon.attila@btk.elte.hu](mailto:simon.attila@btk.elte.hu)

Received 1 February 2021 | Accepted 10 May 2021 | Published online 20 December 2021

**Abstract.** This paper examines the works of representative modernist authors who have rewritten the myth of the Danaids in a self-reflective way. They reuse certain elements of the myth in order to address some of the crucial issues of cultural transmission: interpretation, poetic tradition and communication. The argument focuses on the recycling of the myth of the Danaids as a symbol of endless historical-philological (Nietzsche) and psychological (Freud) interpretations, the exhaustion and the reinvention of the classical literary tradition (Babits), and the impossible possibility of mediating the living voice through telephonic communication (Proust).

**Keywords:** Danaids, Mihály Babits, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Marcel Proust, modernism, classical reception, reinvention of myth, classical literary tradition, history, psychoanalysis, technology and communication

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The literary heritage of classical antiquity from the Renaissance to Classicism, or rather up to German Romanticism, constitutes the basis of a pre-national and, in this sense, a “universal” or “common literature” (not to be confused with “world literature” in the current sense of the term as presupposing the national) which can be considered a sort of “premodern repository.”<sup>2</sup> In addition to thinking of themes, motifs, plots and figures of Greek and Roman mythology as defining the entire

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1 The earlier version of this paper was published in Hungarian: Simon, “Modern Danaidák”. The research for this paper was financially supported by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office within the framework of the Thematic Excellence Program: “Community building: family and nation, tradition and innovation,” ELTE 2020/21, and within the framework of the project „Biopoetics in 20th and 21st Century Hungarian Literature” (K 132113).

2 Tihanov, “On the Significance of Historical Poetics,” 418–19; Tihanov refers to Alexander Veselovsky’s views.

system of literature, we also mean genres, verse forms, meters and even tropes—from directly quoting of ancient texts to reminiscences, and from allusions to patterns which interweave the entirety of literature.

However, since the turn of the 19th century—roughly parallel to the gradual loss of the priority of classics within the academic sphere—the marginalization of the classical tradition has been registered in living culture, as well as in literature.<sup>3</sup> The influence of the ancient cultural “repository” dwindled, and the formal and thematic elements of classical antiquity in European literary culture were gradually effaced—even if the process was not uniform everywhere, nor was it evenly staged.<sup>4</sup>

In Modernism, this tradition was once again challenged. The radical challenging of the creative power of the ancient tradition coincided with a shift which took place between—and for the sake of simplicity, let us associate it with—two well-known names: Winckelmann and Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s relationship to antiquity, once again with some simplification, can mainly be understood as an alteration resulting in Dionysus gaining new prominence in the ancient tableau of gods, placed next to Apollo. That is, a world of irrationality, ecstasy, and tragedy in the Nietzschean-Greek sense. Darkness appeared besides light; the realm of Hades besides the Olympus.

In addition (and more importantly for us), in his early work, Nietzsche had already deviated from the harmonious and, above all, unquestionable relationship with the ancient tradition. In place of Winckelmann’s rules for imitating classical works, he puts greater emphasis on competing or wrestling with the traditions of antiquity, but without losing his admiration for antiquity *reinterpreted*.

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3 For a brief overview of the complex and historically variable constellation of ancient literature, world literature, classical philology and comparative literature, and the Classical Reception Studies as the intersection of the latter two, see Most, “Classics and Comparative Literature,” 155–57. The academic sphere is defined by the tension found in the beginning of this more than two-hundred-year-old story: classical studies had just been established as an independent university discipline when it immediately faced threatening competition in the history of national literatures. Moreover, both were in competition with comparative studies that would only later be institutionalized.

4 This is not contradicted by the predominance of Greco-Latin schooling in English or German areas in the nineteenth century, nor by the *individual* attraction of several poets (such as Tennyson or Swinburne) to antiquity (cf. Cushing, “Babits és az angol klasszika-filológiai hagyomány”). On the other hand, and as noted above, this process cannot be considered as uniform, but as having taken place in alternating waves in the different cultural fields of different linguistic regions. According to Most (“Classics and Comparative Literature,” 157) in the field of humanities in the last two centuries “interrelation between these fields has been surprisingly frequent and intense”.

As a result, a reflection on this relationship itself also appears. This, in fact, stems from the realization that the classical heritage, with its prevailing roles in European culture, needs continuous interpretation and reinvention. As Nietzsche repeatedly proclaimed: the tradition of antiquity and its transmission—philology—became a *problem* rather than a self-evident medium and activity.<sup>5</sup> For him, philology was therefore needed as a critical discipline, i.e., not as textual criticism but rather as critical work assisting the two-way mediation between the classical past and the present.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, the tradition of antiquity within this framework (which is certainly not defined by Nietzsche only) remains a part of and, at times, a crucial part of European literature and thought (as it does with Nietzsche himself), even if more sporadic and indirect than before. Certain elements of this tradition, however, have undergone radical reinterpretations—perhaps even more radical than was usual in the past. The figures of the Danaids seem to be an element of such a completely novel reinterpretation. This article shows that some of the representative modernist authors have rewritten the story of the Danaids using a completely novel and, upon closer inspection, self-reflective approach. They recycle the myth of Danaus's daughters—more specifically, the main figures of the myth, the Danaids, and their work in the Underworld: carrying water to perforated barrels or amphorae—to articulate the crisis of *transmission* or *communication* in the broadest terms.

For closer contextualization of this rewriting, we could refer to a complex problem, key elements of which are the crisis of language—the representational and communicative role of language—as articulated by Nietzsche or, with a different emphasis, by Hofmannsthal; another element is the detachment of classical European tradition from the present and the questioning of its power to carry meaning that leads to its increasingly conspicuous reliance on mediation and interpretation; moreover, understanding other people's psychological processes is seen as having its limitations; and finally, there is the perception that the new technical media of communication with their mysterious operations have had ambivalent effects on individuals and societies.

In what follows, I will examine the evocation of the Danaids as the symbolization of both unending historical-philological (Nietzsche) and psychological (Freud) interpretations, the fallibility of memory and language, the exhaustion and reinvention of the classical literary tradition (Babits), and the impossible possibility of mediating the living voice through tele-phonetic communication (Proust).

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5 Nietzsche, *We Philologists*, fr. 27, fr. 31, fr. 68.

6 Nietzsche, *We Philologists*, fr. 7, fr. 152, fr. 153, fr. 160, fr. 174.

## 2. Babits

With the exception of *Hegeso sírja* [*The Tomb of Hegeso*], all of Babits's 'Greek poems' appear in his second volume, *Herceg, hátha megjön a tél is!* [*Prince, if Winter Should Come*], published in 1911. In addition, his other volumes also contain poems both closely and more loosely related to antiquity in a broader sense. Babits's relationship to classical antiquity was by no means homogeneous or uniformly peaceful, balanced or harmonious; in fact, elements of struggle with the ancient poetic heritage are often present in his work. The title of the opening poem of his first volume is *In Horatium*. The ambiguity of this title (as the preposition *in* does not only mean "against something" but can also be interpreted with the more neutral meaning of "towards something" or "in relation to something") clearly shows that Babits's relationship to Horace—not only in this poem but throughout his oeuvre—is characterized by the duality of subversion and affirmation, in which differing aspects and emphases might gain importance.<sup>7</sup> The figure of Horace should be interpreted here as *pars pro toto*: Babits's entire relationship to antiquity is defined by "tectonic" rearrangements and accompanying tensions.<sup>8</sup>

Babits's poem *A Danaidák* (*The Danaids*), written in March 1909,<sup>9</sup> was also published in his second volume (and prior to that in the 5th issue of *Nyugat* in 1910).<sup>10</sup> The poem is an exceptional model of the spectacular complexity typical of aesthetic modernity, at times exaggerating the decorative sophistication of Art Nouveau.<sup>11</sup> The powerful linguistic imagination of the self-contained, hopeless and depressing Underworld is the result of the combined effect of the poetic factors that determine the poem. This overall effect in the aesthetic experience of the poem should not be interpreted simply as an interplay of *opsis* and *melos* (spectacle and melody) (which is characteristic of all lyrical work), but as a perfect integration or "mirroring" of the two in a way typical of aesthetic modernity.<sup>12</sup> Such is, above all, the irregular pulsation of the verse sections, which loosens and modulates the trochaic meter

7 Imre, "Babits és Horatius."

8 Tverdota, "Klasszikus álmok".

9 Rába, *Babits Mihály költészete*, 294.

10 Babits's poems are cited from Babits, *Összegyűjtött versei*.

11 Rába, *Babits Mihály költészete*, 298. Think about formulas here, such as "eyelids permanently closing", then "wind" as "the lash of languid eyelids, for the whip of wavy waters"; the exaggerated alliterations in the construct "át a réten, hol a Léthe (mert e rét a Léthe réte)" ("to the bank along the Lethe, [for this bank is on the Lethe])" can be heard by the reader almost as a (self) parody. (In the entire paper, I quote the English translation by Peter Zollman available at [https://www.visegradliterature.net/index.php?page=work&interfaceLang=hu&literatureLang=hu&translationLang=all&auth\\_id=119&work\\_id=21673&tran\\_id=21674&tr\\_id=0&tran\\_lang=en](https://www.visegradliterature.net/index.php?page=work&interfaceLang=hu&literatureLang=hu&translationLang=all&auth_id=119&work_id=21673&tran_id=21674&tr_id=0&tran_lang=en)).

12 To explore the two categories of ancient origin as reinterpreted by Culler in the reading of the lyric, see Kulcsár Szabó, "Boldogan és megtörötten?" 44–5.

mainly colored with spondees: “This double rhythm, the short-circuited and regular ones (of the trochees), and the long-arched irregular ones (of the verse sections), run through each other in strange waves, congested, and alternating”<sup>13</sup> (the image of *waves* is also important in the perception of *liquidity*, which plays a key role in the text). At the same time, the “melody” gives a “single, homogeneous” impression,<sup>14</sup> which, alongside other factors, constitutes the phonetic foundation of the oft-mentioned *monotony* of the poem, that can be perceived in different layers. The poem’s syntax can be characterized by the “long sentence” so typical of Babits (the entire text consists of no more than seven sentences—just as the Lethe runs “round and round seven times” (“in seven coiling girdles endlessly the Lethe circles round / and round and back again”), which is “not an evenly structured period, but a weaving of sentences stragglingly winding the subordinates and coordinates, branching, discontinuing and then turning back or further meandering, often seeming almost inextricable”).<sup>15</sup> As a result, the slow and often “loop-like” development of the complex sentences of the poem contributes to the formation of meaning by slowing down the reading as the meaning unfolds. The slow and languid nature of the movements (“prescribed” by the trochees and the spondees) depicted in the poem plays an important role in this, as well as its figures that can be assigned to the *circulation* (thinking mainly of the circular motions of the Lethe and the Danaids).

Interpreters of *The Danaids* agree that the most particular elements of the language of the poem are recurrence and repetition, especially the different forms of repetition of certain words and phrases.<sup>16</sup> The repetitions or “variants” in the text can be understood as morphological repetitions, namely repetitions that take place in the language of the poem both on the level of the signifier and the signified. This alteration of continuity and discontinuity with its known/novel duality<sup>17</sup> gives

13 Nemes Nagy, “Danaidák, ‘dekadencia,’” 52. Feuermann correctly perceived the poem as bimetric (“Babits, *A Danaidák*,” 161); Rába (*Babits Mihály költészete*, 295–96) cites the “rhythm plan” of Poe’s *The Raven* as the main rhythmic pattern for Babits’s poem.

14 Rába, *Babits Mihály költészete*, 296.

15 J. Soltész, “Babits mondattípusai,” 313.

16 Feuermann, “Babits: A Danaidák,” 156–59; for a detailed linguistic analysis of various repetitions, see Büky, “Az ikonicitás megvalósulása”. As a possible, at least partial model of Babits’s poem, Endre Ady’s poem *Women on the Shore* (*Asszonyok a parton*) must be mentioned (first published in 1907), which could have influenced Babits not only with the “thousand women” (Babits’s “fifty women”) phrase, but also with the four times repeated line “A thousand women stood on the shore,” and by predicting context-dependant shifts of meaning of the repeated line. For the most important antecedents of *The Danaids* in world literature, from the ancients through Dante and Goethe to (the probably most important one) Swinburne, see especially Rába, *Babits Mihály költészete*, 294–95.

17 Szegedy-Maszák, “A művészi ismétlődés néhány változata,” 110–14.

the poem a dynamic effect. The forms of repetition—from *iteratio* to *repetitio*, from *reduplicatio* to *redditio*, from *anaphora* to *epiphora* and, present within the sentences of the poem at the end of larger units and, because of this distance, separated, the inconspicuous, but still perceptible *polyptota*—urge a murmur or mantra-like reading of the poem. Semantically, the extreme frequency of specific words and—more or less loosely—of larger phrases can be connected to the ever-repeating activities of the Danaids in the Underworld.

The most characteristic features of the requisites of the Underworld displayed on the scenic level of the poem—which also determines the affective quality of experiencing the text—are looming darkness, profound silence, and stillness (with the only exception being the River Lethe, though its movement, as noted earlier, is both a beginning and an end, a monotonous circulation flowing back into itself without a source or estuary, where movement and stasis cannot therefore be firmly separated). In this Underworld, movement is primarily related to the Danaids, while vocalization is exclusively related to them. Movements occurring in this almost motionless environment, as has been previously discussed, are represented as fluctuating, slow rolling, and dragging (besides the Lethe’s circular rolling, we can also think of the quality of the girls’ movements), not only in the images but also in the rhythm of the poem. The repetition in the language evokes the mechanical character of the elements on a referential level (firstly, in the girls’ movements).<sup>18</sup> As for the girls, this may even evoke the image of their robot-like quality.

This machine or robot-like nature is further reinforced by the descriptive representation of the Danaids, which emphasizes their group-like and sculptural, non-individual character, their resemblance to one another and even to the amphorae.<sup>19</sup> Consider that all of the women, simply referred to as the “fifty women”, have bodies the color of “alabaster” that, at the same time, makes them similar to “alabaster amphorae”. Their hair is also uniformly “ebony coloured”, and they all sing and act in the mechanically repetitive structures of the language of the poem the same way throughout: “Thus the fifty sisters chanted, doomed widows of deep resemblance, pallid shapes of alabaster, fifty wives with raven tresses” (*Igy dalolt az ötven asszony, ötven kárhozott bús asszony, egymáshoz mind oly hasonló ébenfürtü, alabastrom testü ötven testvérasszony*). The idea of automatons or robots could not have been new to Babits, as it had already been known by Homer: Hephaestus, the god of metalworking, was assisted by maids made of gold, able to think as well as speak (*Iliad* XVIII. 417–420; Babits’s poem entitled *Héphaisztosz [Hephaestus]*, which can also be understood as a self-portrait, must have been inspired by the scene portraying Hephaestus’s work).

18 Gintli, “Istennők párbeszéde,” 169.

19 Bartal, *Áthangzások*, 47–8.

The monotonous repetition of the Danaids' movement, as has been highlighted by several interpreters, does not only determine the girls' motions, but also their songs. Babits, in fact, *makes the Danaids sing* and, in the still and silent realm of Hades, of the two elements of movement and song—which can mainly, or even, exclusively be associated with the girls—it is the latter which attracts the reader's attention more. I have, so far, found no trace of any other literary version of the myth, ancient or later tradition, in which Danaus's daughters sing<sup>20</sup> – at least regarding their underworldly “existence”. (In Aeschylus's play *The Suppliants*, they form the singing Chorus, but in the third, lost part of Aeschylus's trilogy called *Danaids*, they probably did not descend to the Underworld.) With this innovative and re-interpretive addition, and with this emphatic inclusion of singing (which makes up a quarter of the poem), Babits does not only place the mythical plot in the psychological and metaphysical contexts of sin and punishment – that is, of the violent prevention of wedlock as an “end purpose” and the acts that follow as a punishment, repeated aimlessly and meaninglessly—but he also creates the opportunity to be able to read the poem as a text about language, or even about poetry. The song of the Danaids, a song within the song, a poem within the poem, could be read as a self-reflecting configuration: this poem is about language and poetry and, what is more, about relationship to poetic forms and traditions.

The largest part of the poem, which encompasses the song of the Danaids, is primarily presented in the genre of description (*descriptio*) and can be understood as part of the narrative (*narratio*), while the dramatizing genre of imaginary speech (*sermocinatio*) is wedged in by staging the song. What characterizes this song? Let us first look at the staging itself. The song of the Danaids is sung in a “stifled voice (“*fojtott hangon*” – this element is not translated by Zollman)” by the “fifty doomed, tormented sisters”. The indication of vocal quality, the “stifled voice”, and of the number of choristers add to an important, metarepresentational framework: the dithyrambic chorus also had fifty members.<sup>21</sup> Babits stages the Danaids as a tragic (or dithyrambic) chorus. The performance of the chorus as a chanter of the Dionysian truth—in that respect also close to lyric poetry– was articulated by Nietzsche in

20 For the ancient relic, see Bernhard, “Danaiden”; Keuls, “Danaides”. In Ermitage there is a volute-krater (B 1717 [St. 424], the 18th image at Keuls), on which there are dancing Danaids. This can refer to singing as well. For the afterlife, Kreuz et al., *Bibliographie*. To highlight only a few major literary authors in whose works the Danaids appear: Cervantes (Kreuz et al., *Bibliographie*, 156), Goethe and Schiller (337), Schiller (374), Karl Philipp Moritz (382), Jean Paul (387, 388, 391, 394), Schopenhauer (475).

21 In connection with Aeschylus's Danaids trilogy, it has been suggested that the chorus may have followed this number; however, this is probably not the case. See Lesky, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, 289.



*The Birth of Tragedy*—a work which made a strong impact on Babits.<sup>22</sup> When Babits entrusts a *chorus* (whose members are not individual but robotic parts of a group) with the *exploration* and *expression* of confession and personal memory, of the soul or the inner life, he joins in Nietzsche’s critique of the subjective (romantic) perception of lyric poetry. This criticism is performed by the Danaids in Babits’s poem. Accordingly, this maneuver brings the song of the Danaids close to one of the origins of the Dionysian lyric of the chorus: that of the non-subjective lyrical speech.<sup>23</sup> The stakes here are greater or at least more poetic than the “personal” confession of the fifty women—which is doomed to failure due to the defect in the creation of “personal” memory and, therefore, of coherent “subjects”.

The end of the song, which claims purposeless determination, belongs to the same framework: “keep echoing without knowing, otherwise the world is silent and the silence so harrowing, and the silent deadly darkness never, never says a word (*és daloljunk, bár nem értjük, mert különben némaság van, és a némaság oly félős! néma, rengeteg sötétség: a sötétség nem beszél –*)”. The sound of the stifled song, which is meaningless for its performers, becomes important in its sheer sound; the atmospheric-auratic effect of the sound soothes the singers’ fear. The merging of silence with darkness or obscurity characterizes not only the exterior (the “Underworld”) but also the singers’ interior world. Moreover, the contrast between darkness and light is also manifested in the relationship between the soul and words: “Long lost words are dimly glowing in our souls’ decaying fire, as if they were streetlights, gilding the walls of an unlit building (*Régi szavak járnak vissza elsötétült lelkeinkbe, mint sötétben nagy szobákba utcáról behullott fények*)”. The effect of words is also restrained here, however, in their restraint words are still similarly important: the accidental appearance of the words in the soul, evoking recurring fears and ghosts, is similar to a streetlight accidentally “gilding” the walls of a dark room, which, in its contingency and transitivity, does not offer the full light of transparency, but still sheds some light onto something.

It can also be seen as a meta-representative emphasis of the staging of the song—already involving the semantic dimension (the confusion within)—that the meanings of the words that make up the song of the Danaids are in themselves obscured to the singers; the linguistic elements are meaningless, unreliable testimonies to their past actions and feelings, performed by mechanical rote repetition—just like carrying water to the perforated amphorae. Paradoxically, the strongest semantic binding of the song of the Danaids created through repetitions is made by the blurring and forgetting of the meaning of the words that make up the song, or the incomprehensibility of the

22 Rába, *Babits Mihály költészete*, 296.

23 Nietzsche, KSA 1. 64. For the tradition of choral lyric in 20th century Hungarian poetry, most of all in Milán Füst’s and Sándor Weöres’s works, see Bartal, *Áthangzások*, 63–130.



words.<sup>24</sup> With their song, the Danaids are unable to account for their past actions and, as a result, they cannot create their coherent story and, consequently, their personality. That is, from another point of view: they are unable to “sing out” their sinful actions, the song does not bring them the redemption of confession.<sup>25</sup> As their meaning is obscured, the words flicker, moreover, are drained or dissipated, and are not fit for meaningfully recalling their actions. Singing as memory and as expression fails.

The decisively important notion of liquidity in the text is related primarily to femininity, to blood (not only that of the suitors, but also in relation to the “ceaseless” menstrual bleeding which can only be stopped by conception), to the water of the Lethe in the poem, and to the mythical tradition directly invoked in the poem. At the same time, the phrase “ever draining, ever filling” that appears in the song of the rueful girls can also be interpreted as the liquidity of words, their source or river (“just keep chanting, never knowing, *ever draining, ever filling, ever straining, never slowing*” – the italics are mine). Károly Kerényi, in his analysis of the mythological image of the source of the River Lethe, draws a parallel between the Danaids and the Lethe as flowing water and oblivion (the figure of *lēthē* and Lesmosyne), as both an irreversible outpour of memory and as the source and the fluid nature of memory (the figure of *mnēmē* and Mnemosyne), undergoing a *flow-through* of unfulfilment (the unbedded wedding and the perforated amphorae): “The flowing water symbolizes whatever passes, and water as a source is an archetypal image of the origin of life—and of memory.”<sup>26</sup>

24 “[long lost words] how could be trusted as we chant them never knowing what is?”; “what’s the meaning of?”; “just keep chanting, never knowing”; “keep echoing without knowing”

25 Nor does it for a particular mistress Ágnes (in János Arany’s poem *Ágnes asszony, Mistress Ágnes*), her compulsive task of washing “her blood-stained sheet” clean, “from year’s end unto year’s end, / Winter, summer, all year through” in another river (trans. by William N. Loew). In Babits’s poem the Lethe’s water is “swilled with ancient, long-forgotten guilt”.

26 Kerényi, “Mnemosyne—Lesmosyne,” 680. The song of the Danaids, however, has some components that do not fit either the concept of “unfulfilledness” presented above or the known versions of the myth. (Could this be another inventive reinterpretation of Babits?) The phrasing comes to mind wherein the sorrowful girls still characterize their worldly existence with words referring to love, desire, perhaps even fertility, or at least a flourishing life (or even happiness?), and golden sunlight: “for we loved and freely lusted [...] in the glorious golden sunshine, on the earth beneath the sky”, and as if, more precisely, their unrecallable memories were also moving in this circle: “never knowing what is *loved?* and what is *lusted?* what’s the meaning of: *desire?*” Puzzling phrases that do not allow for a true attitude of mind, as filling the worldly jug of desire is accompanied by “emptying” (so, was the desire not fulfilled after all? or did it “empty” after fulfilment?), and the love–desire–lust trio surely does not refer to real past events, perhaps only to imagined events, “daydreamings”, desires that have remained desires (so the daughters could really never be “knowing what is *loved?* and what is *lusted?* what’s the meaning of *desire?*”). In any case, as figures of the myth (think of Aeschylus’s *The Suppliants*) the daughters resent marriage to their cousins (!), and kill their husbands before saying farewell to their maidenhood.

Though Babits' Danaids are unconscious, they have feeling: they sing their "half-understood" verses "wakeful, yet without awareness". The poem uses the same expressions to describe "mourning trees". This aspect of plant-like life—similarly to the way Greek poetic imagination conjures the dead of the Underworld—indicates a sort of undead existence (and in this way, this plant-like nature is not so far removed from the machine-like discussed earlier, regardless of the contrast between the mechanical and the organic). The act of singing would tilt this hybrid form of plant-like existence, which can be conceived of as being undead in case of man, towards something akin to life, or at least towards a hint of activity. However, the feelings and memories of the fifty "tormented sisters" are incommunicable, unrecoverable, unverifiable by the "long lost words", and thus the futility and incomprehensibility of the song associates this action with a helpless dead being.

The "amphorae" in the poem can be seen as a critique of language and even poetry, on a referential and rhetorical level, as well as on the material level of signifiers. These "amphorae", as vessels used for storing and transporting water, are empty, or at least perforated, damaged, have lost their integrity, and are therefore unable to preserve or transport, that is, to "transfer": the water poured into them drains or flows away. The counterpart of the amphorae in the system of the isotopes of the poem could be words, the song or the "classical forms"—as "vessels" of meaning or content, or as giving "form" to the "formless" substance poured into them: water. What is more, for modern readers, *amphora* both as a word and as an object could be a synecdoche of "classical forms", thus involving not only a linguistic but also a poetic or traditional criticism in the range of possible interpretations of the poem. In this way, the construct "ever draining ever filling" does not only refer to water first and then to words, but also to the inability to fill poetic forms with content, to their "being drained". Thus, words and forms, in the same way as amphorae, are incapable of preserving and communicating their content: their meaning or content, as it has been noted, drains or flows away. Moreover, the six occurrences of "amphora" in the text call attention to the material components of the word—their phonemes and letters—which highlight their projection of the signifier and the metaphorical object onto one another: in Hungarian, the words *forma* and *amorf* are a perfect anagram, and, with the addition of one vowel, so is *amphora*.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to proving a defect in personal memory, in its somewhat paradoxical way (since the erasure of memory of the underworldly women is not complete,

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27 A well-known Hungarian advertising slogan of the eighties took advantage of this phonetic similarity: "*Tartalomhoz a forma: Amfora!*" "Form adjusted to content: Amphora!" (I was reminded of this by Gábor Tamás Molnár, I thank him for that; the advert can be viewed here from 3:50: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqRABRRAsSA>)

they can still recall some actions<sup>28</sup>), the song of the Danaids can also be read as a partial erasure of cultural or literary memory, the memory of forms and myth. Consider this: in Babits's poem the figures in the mythical story forget and cannot tell their own mythical story. In this context, when the Danaids are singing “[d]eep, the darkness keeps its secret and the shadows don't reply” (about the meaning of the words “to love”, “to desire”, “to embrace”, which are the most important codes in love-poetry, one of the elementary forms of lyric), they may as well be poets among these shadows. Horace sings about (*Carm.* II. 13. 21–40) how the song of Sappho and Alcaeus impresses the inhabitants of the Underworld and how Orpheus's song softens Danaus's daughters: for a moment the pitcher stops in their hands (III. 11. 22–24). Furthermore, in Virgil's description of the Underworld, that Babits was surely familiar with, Orpheus and Musaeus are also present (*Aeneis* VI. 645–678). Traces of the erasure of the song, of the forgetting, of the silencing and the inability to transmit are also present in Babits's other poems as well. There are two noteworthy examples of this.

The first one is from the poem *Thamyris*. The title refers to the mythical Thracian singer, who, challenged and defeated by the Muses, is blinded and deprived of his poetic talent, thus becoming a symbol of the tragic fate of poets and of poetic talent as a gift from the gods, which man cannot control. At the beginning of the poem, Thamyris complains he is paralysed, and lives in a silence and forgetfulness due to which he is unable to pluck the lyre, to produce sound or remember the song: “I am now lame, I am now mute, / daily forgetting the song”. However, it is not only singing in general, but the irrevocability of the classical past in particular which appears in Babits's poetry. In this context, the poem *Classical Dreams (Klasszikus álmok)* should also be mentioned. Its significance is apparent in the fact that Babits originally planned to entitle the entire volume after this poem.<sup>29</sup> In the poem these “classical dreams” appear as “tired” and “fading thoughts”. These dream-thoughts, however, are embodied in the appearance of girls offering a sacrifice in front of the temple of the goddess. This is what we read about them: “Your wreath / a sapless, orphaned laurel; the costly trimming of the peplum / shows its colour reversed, as feverish dream: / no wonder, old wreath and a thousand-year-old suit.” (The poetic implications of the laurel wreath and the “thousand-year-old suit” are obvious, and these attributes are associated with privation: the laurel is “sapless” and “orphaned”, the suit is “a thousand year[s] old” and therefore its edges are faded.) No wonder that “the goddess thinks of you not”. For this goddess looks down in her distant and

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28 “We have murdered fifty valiant wedded husbands, for we loved and freely lusted”, but it is then followed by: “heaven knows for whom we lusted”; “So let us chant: *We have murdered*—and remember well: *our husbands*”, and later here as well: “never knowing, keep echoing”.

29 Rába, *Babits Mihály költészete*, 287.

reserved majesty on the mortal men coming and turning to her, in the whirlwind of great times passing by. These girls offering a sacrifice are therefore the thoughts of the lyrical I receding into the shadows of the antiquity, evoking the classical age, wanting to be in communion, and, if I understand correctly, the goddess can be interpreted as the allegorical figure of classical heritage, who, in her majestic tranquility, cares nothing for these embodied dreams and thoughts. The past of antiquity is inaccessible in its meaningful and lively nature, in the rich content of its form. With Babits, in line with the aforementioned ambiguity of his relation to antiquity, there are other attitudes towards (classical) forms and creators, which are indicative of a timelessness (or even an enrichment over time) and the resonant nature of the lyrical I even in the present—for example in his *Sonnets* and *Homer*.

The duality observed in the relation between antiquity (the poetic heritage of the classical tradition) and the conveyability of antiquity—which, more generally, can be understood as the duality of memory and forgetting, of expressibility and inexpressibility, of conveyability and non-conveyability, and of the giving and losing of meaning—does not only appear in the aforementioned poems of the volume *Herceg, hátha megjön a tél is!* [*Prince, if Winter Should Come*], but is also emergent in a similar structure in *The Danaids*. To show this, we must first recall another point Kerényi makes. He contends that Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses and therefore of poetry, also has something to do with the Lethe or *lēthē*, oblivion, just as primordially. Kerényi refers to Hesiod, who says in *Theogony* (53–55) that Mnemosyne did not only give birth to the Muses after “blending in love” with Zeus, but also (and all at once) birthed “the forgetting of troubles and the calming of worries (*lēsmosynēn te kakōn ampauma te mermēraōn*)”. Poetry is linked to oblivion through the forgetting of troubles. “This unity of opposites under the rule of their positive side” is manifested in the fact that “this is also a gift from the Muses deriving from Mnemosyne, the Lethe, which dispels all things belonging to the nocturnal side of life. Together, these two form the essence of the goddess: illumination and illusion; Mnemosyne and her opposite, Lesmosyne.”<sup>30</sup>

Naturally, oblivion in Babits’s poem, unlike Hesiod’s, at least at first glance, is only associated with the negative values of loss. Moreover, for him, the primary object of forgetting is also different: it is not “troubles” which are forgotten but the words which express worldly actions, as well as past actions themselves, the memories of which have been erased (and which were naturally quite “troubled”, and therefore had to be forgotten). It is not clear, however, if the song itself, the “singing”, completely loses its significance and thus only retells the loss, the final disappearance of the irreversible, as in that case it would only be a painful song, the tormented,

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30 Kerényi, “Mnemosyne – Lesmosyne,” 686.

“inexplicable” return of the repressed.<sup>31</sup> However, the song of the Danaids shows that despite the partial erasure or loss of meanings of words, the song and the forms demonstrated above, these words, this song and these forms must be sung. And it is not only confirmed by the Danaids as protagonists of Babits’s poem but also by the “song” *The Danaids* because Babits’s reinvention of the mythological story is a poem *per se*. This singing functions as a sort of chanting, moving away from the loss of the personal and literary, as well as the cultural memory, and perhaps, even from the need for sense itself. This song at least has the beneficial effect of driving away the dreadful silence of the Underworld:

‘So let us chant: *We have murdered*—and remember well: *our husbands*, just keep chanting, never knowing, ever draining, ever filling; ever straining, never slowing; keep echoing without knowing, otherwise the world is silent and the silence so harrowing! and the silent deadly darkness never, never says a word.’

### 3. Nietzsche

Babits expresses the crisis of language and the crisis of relation to tradition, the ceasing, or at least, the questioning of the content and conveyability of words and singing, or even the “exhausting” of classical poetic traditions in the recycling of words and forms of this very tradition and language. In relation to tradition, and, in particular, to the ancient tradition, a similar tendency can be observed with Nietzsche, who at this time was a decisive influence on Babits’s work and personality.

The duality already mentioned above—the duality of conveyability and non-conveyability, of giving meaning and losing meaning—is present not only in the poems of Babits. In 1911, he wrote a review in *Nyugat* on the first published volume of Nietzsche’s philological writings.<sup>32</sup> This text eagerly affirms Nietzsche’s relationship to classics and to classical philology (more on this later), going as far as to distinguish between two types of philologists: the philologist “without a philosophical and emotional background”, and the philologist who is not “a thorough researcher, but has an enthusiastic understanding”, that is, the philologist turned into a philosopher. Here, the philosopher-philologist—and not just in reference to Nietzsche, who truly had become a philosopher—can be understood in a broader sense, as a discerning and interpretive scholar beyond positivism, for whom the “subject of philology in the broadest sense” is “the intellectual works and intellectual

31 According to Ritoók, “Márai és Homéros”, Babits’s poem “is about man in general, as a being tormented by guilt, who may stifle guilt, the depressing memory—but who cannot escape it”.

32 Nietzsche, *Philologica I*.

history of mankind”.<sup>33</sup> In the eyes of Babits, as in those of Nietzsche the transmission of data, which dominated the approach of traditional positivist philology, is surpassed by philology’s potential of conveying meaning.

In addition to shaping Babits’s ideas of the Greeks and philology, Nietzsche also impacted—besides the already mentioned influence on forming the “chorus” of the Danaids—his approach to art, again mainly through *The Birth of Tragedy*. The 1912 text *A Philosophy of Play*, written shortly after *The Danaids* and *Nietzsche, the Philologist*, is one of the most important and highly interesting texts in this regard, one in which Nietzsche’s influence, alongside that of Plato and Bergson, can be most strongly felt, and one which raises questions on the nature of art from an ontological perspective.<sup>34</sup>

The figure of the Danaids appears in Nietzsche’s oeuvre in several places serving different functions. The following is a fragment of *We Philologist*, an early, unfinished work presenting a context of primary importance for our subject:

Careful meditation upon the past leads to the impression that we are a multiplication of many pasts—so how can we be a final aim? But why not? In most instances, however, we do not wish to be this. We take up our positions again in the ranks, work in our own little corner, and hope that what we do may be of some small profit to our successors. But that is exactly the barrel of the Danaids (*Aber das ist wirklich das Fass der Danaiden*)—and this is useless, we must again set about doing everything for ourselves, and only for ourselves, measuring science by ourselves, for example with the question: What is science *to us*? And not: What are we to science? People really make life too easy for themselves when they look upon themselves from such a simple historical point of view, and make humble servants of themselves. ‘Your own salvation above everything’—that is what you should say; and there are no institutions which you should prize more highly than your own soul.—Now, however, man learns to know himself: he finds himself miserable, despises himself, and is pleased to find something worthy of respect outside himself. Therefore, he gets rid of himself, so to speak, makes himself subservient to a cause, does his duty strictly, and atones for his existence. He knows that he does not work for himself alone; he wishes to help those who are daring enough to exist on account of themselves, like Socrates. The majority of men are, as it were, suspended in the air like toy balloons; every breath of wind moves them—*Consequence: the scholar must be such out of self-knowledge, that is to say, out of contempt for himself—in*

33 The terms quoted: Babits, “Nietzsche mint filológus,” 257, 256, 262.

34 Babits, “Játékfilozófia”. For the influence of Nietzsche, especially *The Birth of Tragedy* (and with this Michelet as well) in Babits’s early works, see Kelevéz, “Lelkembem bakhánszlárma tombol”.



*other words he must recognize himself to be merely the servant of some higher being who comes after him. Otherwise, he is simply a sheep.*<sup>35</sup>

This highly complex passage, unfolding with junctions and reversals, addresses several topics. The main line of thought important to us can now be reconstructed as follows: it is an illusion for the philologist to believe that in its linear unfolding, history moves his science forward in a cumulative way. At the same time, it is also an illusion if he assumes that he is the end goal of this process and places his own importance above all else. The meaning of the philologist's work only becomes clear when he knows that he serves a higher purpose: a life characterized above all—as opposed to the heteronomy of his life—by his autonomy-based superiority. It is obviously no mere coincidence that Nietzsche, a philologist turned philosopher, mentions the name of a (or *the*) philosopher: Socrates. The term “the barrel of the Danaids” (*das Fass der Danaiden*) functions as a criticism of the philologist who places himself into a long line of colleagues and perceives philological activity as superimposed layers of scientific production, as the continuous accumulation of different interpretations, that is, as the accumulation of philological knowledge.

According to another fragment, the reason the philologist starts (or resumes)—in a Danaiden fashion—his own work of *drawing water*, is because even though philology is a science of the ancient world, “its elements are not inexhaustible” (*ihr Stoff ist zu erschöpfen*). What cannot be exhausted (*Nicht zu erschöpfen ist*), however, is the ever-new adaptation of one's age to antiquity; the comparison of the two. If we make it our task to understand *our own* age better by means of the antiquity (*vermitteltst des Alterthums*), then our task will be an everlasting one.”<sup>36</sup>

Against this background of insight into the historicity of understanding, the work of the philologist, like that of the Danaids (a truly exhausting undertaking due to its inexhaustible exhaustion), is neither meaningless nor purposeless. Evidently, Nietzsche does not criticize philological work itself, but the incorrect, positivist self-interpretation of the philologist, exhausted by the purposefulness of data collection (cf. what is said about the philologist who lacks a true calling and who misrepresents the field: Nietzsche, *We Philologists*, fr. 10). The idea behind the image of the Danaids is the equivalent of a non-teleological and non-linear conception of history; it is a necessary corollary of it which shows *non-hierarchical* differences between the different issues of different eras, and between the historically different life-concerning motivations of understanding which ultimately exhort the philologist to continue working towards a new understanding.

35 Nietzsche, *We Philologists*, fr. 21. The translation has been modified (cf. Nietzsche, KSA 8. 33–34 [wherein the numbering of the fragments is different]).

36 Nietzsche, *We Philologists*, fr. 7; Nietzsche, KSA 8. 31.



Perhaps a critique of Eduard von Hartmann's teleological interpretation of history (*Philosophie des Unbewußten*, 1868) is behind this idea. Nietzsche explained this in another early work, in his second "Untimely Meditation" a year prior to his notes in *We Philologists*: in the ninth unit of *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*.<sup>37</sup> Here Nietzsche criticizes (not once satirically), above all, the components and connections of Hartmann's Hegelian ideas that view the course of history as deterministic and purposeful viewed from the modern age (defined by the "laws" of history,<sup>38</sup> and the people of the modern era as "[p]eaks and targets of the world process,"<sup>39</sup> and it is in this sense that they talk about "the total surrender of his personality to the world process" (*die volle Hingabe der Persönlichkeit an den Weltprozess*).<sup>40</sup> Here, besides the act of subordination and merging, the idea that still attributes a prominent role to "personality" also becomes the subject of sarcastic criticism: "The personality and the world process! The world process and the personality of the flea-beetle!"<sup>41</sup> In this composition, we can see the sample of an exemplary story introducing a text also created around this time, *On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense*. This story is about certain "clever animals", who are "invented knowledge", and therefore imagine themselves as the center of the universe, even though "[t]hat was the most arrogant and the most untruthful moment in 'world history'"<sup>42</sup>

But the parallel between Hartmann's critique and Nietzsche's interpretation of philology is apparent not only in notional and conceptual similarities but also in the reversal of the image of the Danaid used by Hartmann. In his second Untimely Meditation, Nietzsche refers to the concept of *Philosophie des Unbewußten*, which challenges the infinite nature of the world-process regarding both the past and the

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37 Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 49–58.

38 Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 55.

39 Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 50.

40 Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 49, 52; Nietzsche, KSA 1. 312, 316.

41 Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 49; Nietzsche, KSA 1. 312.

42 Nietzsche 1989: 246; Nietzsche, KSA 1. 875. Another parallel: "What the 'world' is there for, what 'humanity' is there for is not to concern us for the time being, unless we want to be funny: for there just isn't anything funnier and more cheerful on the world's stage than the presumptuousness of those little worms called man" (Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 54–5); cf. once again with the findings of the 1873 study of the invention of cognition as the 'most arrogant' moment in world history, as well as with what Nietzsche says here about the 'star', '[i]n some remote corner of the universe... on which clever animals invented knowledge'; or his phrasing of the 'intellect': "It is utterly human, and only its owner and producer takes it with such pathos as if the whole world hinged upon it." (Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying," 246).

present, with sardonic commentary in the form of quips interjected into the quote. Since, as Hartmann says, and as quoted by Nietzsche, “each would invalidate the concept of a development toward a goal (oh more of a rogue!) and would equate the world process with the Danaides’ drawing water (*und stellte den Weltprozess dem Wassers schöpfen der Danaiden gleich*). The complete victory of the logical over the illogical (oh rogue of rogues!), however, must coincide with the temporal end of the world process, with judgment day”.<sup>43</sup> In Hartmann’s teleological concept, the image of the Danaids is portrayed in a negative light, since it symbolizes the aimlessness of world history and its consequences in counterfactual reasoning. According to Hartmann, however, world history cannot be without ends if eventually it must reach its end due to the ever-growing dominance of the unfolding of The Logical in a Hegelian sense. This is what Nietzsche challenges.

Nietzsche, even at the end of the fragment of *We Philologists* that contains the image of the Danaids, does not backtrack on this character of philological activity: the work forever restarting, as antiquity is finite yet still inexhaustible, always working from its own questions. The mention of Socrates and a higher being may refer to the “individual” who is contrasted in several places with the “philologist”, who always works and lives for others. At the same time, it may also refer to the “poet-philologists”, who practice their work as creation and *art*.<sup>44</sup> Philology as a Danaidean task is not a fruitless or hopeless continuation of meaningless, aimless and futile repetition, but a symbol of the work of interpretation that is always restarting and always has something new to say, and is, in this sense, infinite and never reaches its (non-existing) target. Philology, understood here as interpretation, is part of the “ubiquity” that characterizes the Nietzschean interpretation (not only in the scope of understanding culture but of nature as well), and which makes the nineteenth century author a forerunner of twentieth-century hermeneutics.<sup>45</sup> The Danaidean work in this sense is both a curse and a blessing to philologists. Only after realizing this, can we understand Nietzsche’s adage: “People in general think that philology is at an end—while I believe that it has not yet begun”.<sup>46</sup>

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43 Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 54; Nietzsche, KSA 1. 318.

44 See for example Nietzsche, *We Philologists*, fr. 9, fr. 12, fr.22, fr. 49, fr. 171.

45 For this, see Babich, “Nietzsche and the Ubiquity of Hermeneutics,” mainly 86, 87, 88. Gadamer himself also reports on Nietzsche’s influence on hermeneutics, see: Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 283 (Nietzsche as a forerunner of Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology), 301 and 306 (in relation to the concept of the horizon, the Nietzschean antecedents of the principle of history of effect).

46 Nietzsche, *We Philologists*, fr. 24.

#### 4. Freud

Sigmund Freud did not devote a separate analysis to the Danaids' myth and the Danaids did not come to denote any type of neurosis either. However, in the final essay of the early *Studies on Hysteria* (*Studien über Hysterie*) co-written with Josef Breuer, entitled *The Psychotherapy of Hysteria* (*Zur Psychotherapie der Hysterie*), he once refers to the work of the Danaids (*Danaidenarbeit*—in the English version the term *Sisyphean task* is used).<sup>47</sup> The reference is to when, in the case of acute hysteria, the patient most intensively produces hysterical symptoms and the manifestations of the illness are constantly prevailing over the Self (i.e., in the case of hysterical psychosis). At this point, not even the cathartic method can do much to change the effect and the course of the illness.<sup>48</sup> By this point, the causes of neurosis have already fulfilled their task and there is no way to influence the process: the affection, i.e., the effect of the disease, cannot be broken; the course of the disease must be waited out and the patient must be afforded the best possible conditions for this period. If the symptoms of the disease, i.e., the recurrent hysterical symptoms, are eliminated in the acute phase, the analyst must reckon with the fact that they will be immediately supplanted by other symptoms.<sup>49</sup> In this inconsolable situation, as Freud puts it: “The doctor will not be spared the uncanny impression of doing Danaidean work, and of ‘Moorwashing’ [whitewashing]” (*Der verstimmende Eindruck einer Danaidenarbeit, einer ‘Mohrenwäsche’ wird dem Arzte nicht erspart bleiben*).<sup>50</sup> In addition to this

47 The text *Zur Psychotherapie der Hysterie* is part of the collection of studies *Studien über Hysterie* (1895); the page number of the English edition is always given first, followed by that of the German); *Zur Psychotherapie der Hysterie*, in which Freud draws a balance of previous studies, here: Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 255–305; Freud “Studien über Hysterie,” 254–312.

48 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 263–64; Freud, “Studien über Hysterie,” 261–62.

49 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 263; Freud, “Studien über Hysterie,” 262.

50 Bowlby (*Freudian Mythologies* 75–80) mentions the gender and racial significance of the English translation, that is, that “Danaidenarbeit” became “Sisyphean task” and the term “Mohrenwäsche” completely disappears from the translation. Today’s meaning of the German term *Mohrenwäsche* is given by the Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache as follows: *Versuch, einen Schuldigen reinzuwaschen* (<https://www.dwds.de/wb/Mohrenw%C3%A4sche>). Whether or not this precise meaning and connotation were active at the end of the nineteenth century, I do not know. In previous occurrences in the Grimm dictionary (Wieland, Rost, Kotzebue), there is no trace of the compound term, nor do the idiomatic structures (including in Simrock’s collection of idioms) seem to have a lively moral emphasis in today’s use, but rather simply refer to the impossibility of “washing the Moor (= dark skinned person) white” (of course, not without all the depreciating overtone towards the “Moor/dark skinned” person—this could have been the basis of a later moral connotation), and thus to futile labour, laborious and useless work ([http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui\\_py?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GM06586#XGM06586](http://woerterbuchnetz.de/cgi-bin/WBNetz/wbgui_py?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GM06586#XGM06586)). That is, to what the term seems to refer to by Freud, without any moral connotation. The fact that Freud encloses the word in quotation

enormous and exhausting effort and to the dissatisfaction of the patient's family, this frustration certainly contributes to the fact that in this situation the consistent application of the cathartic method is practically impossible.<sup>51</sup>

The possible implications of mentioning the Danaids in Freud's work are wittily explored in Rachel Bowlby's book *Freudian Mythologies*. I will therefore confine myself to a summary of what is most necessary in understanding the passage that talks about the Danaids, remaining largely within the internal context of *Studies on Hysteria*, to which Bowlby pays less attention.

However, in order to show that this question was fundamental to Freud, it is worth cursorily mentioning his famous essay *Analysis Terminable and Interminable* [*Die endliche und die unendliche Analyse*] published in 1937.<sup>52</sup> This late text, written in possession of several decades of accumulated psychoanalytic experience, articulates conceptually the specific paradox of the analyst's work: the theoretical ability to conclude analysis is not always feasible in practice, as dominance over instinct is not always sufficiently ensured. The analysis does not have unlimited means of power, and the end result of the treatment always depends on the relationship of the psychic forces in tension.

Going back to the time when the *Studies on Hysteria* was written, we can firstly say that Freud's method, which gradually turned away from hypnosis and slowly from the cathartic method as well, was based on a form of communication that was increasingly—and later, solely—giving space to free association, and which was conducted with the patient alert.<sup>53</sup> The function of this form of communication—which, though occasionally supplemented by suggestion, increasingly pushed it from the

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marks may indicate more things, therefore, it does not provide a definite basis for a more precise interpretation of the meaning and connotations of the word. Most likely, the quotation mark here may indicate that Freud would have liked to return to the "original", i.e., morally unchanged meaning of the term, which is somewhat different from the meaning that had been transformed by that age.

51 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 263. When Freud mentions "the dissatisfaction of the patient's family", then perhaps—because although he does not say so, it is easy to imagine the situation—we can think of the fruitless communication between the therapist and the worrying, puzzled (as they do not know the time required for the course of neurosis, as opposed to, say, an infection), importunate or even insinuatingly reproachful relatives, and thus we can think of the failure to reassure them, which can bear such a burden on the doctor that it hinders his work. The original German version reads: "die Unbefriedigung der Angehörigen, denen die Vorstellung der notwendigen Zeitdauer einer akuten Neurose kaum so vertraut sein wird wie im analogen Falle einer akuten Infektionskrankheit" (Freud "Studien über Hysterie," 262).

52 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 216–53.

53 Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 169–70; Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, 256–62.

foreground—was to enable the patient to recall pathogenic memories and, by re-experiencing them, to express and deduce (*abführen*) the affects that they associate with the original traumatizing experience which had been immediately repressed (*Verdrängung*).<sup>54</sup>

As Freud's formulations repeatedly confirm, linguistic interaction between physician and patient is key in this process. First, only verbal interactions—communication—enable a “cathartic” recall of repressed memories. Second, the patient must also express the trauma-related affects, possibly through means of linguistic symbolization, as these affects can transpire “as substitute of action” (this is what Freud calls “abreaction”, *Abreagieren*). In fact, in some cases “speaking is itself the adequate reflex, when, for instance, it is an act of lamentation or giving utterance to a tormenting secret, e.g., a confession.”<sup>55</sup> The patient gets rid of the arising image by “carrying it away” (*Der Kranke trägt es gleichsam ab*); he takes it away from himself, replaces it, i.e., “by turning it into words”, *replaces it with words, translates it into words (indem er es in Worte umsetzt)*.<sup>56</sup>

This replacement—transferring embarrassing content into words—is crucial for Freud. His interest in linguistic phenomena, the relationships between soul and language and their complex interrelationship is well-known, from his study *Jokes* to the analysis of slips of the tongue and the interpretation of the linguistic components of dreams. In the study of jokes, slips, and dreams, psychoanalytic interpretations are often guided by the random interplay of signifiers. (It is salient that in contrast to this, in his studies written on literary texts it is the thematic depiction of motifs, images and psychological phenomena that assumes importance; the linguistic-semiotic interpretation only appears in the “analysis” of names. The explanation could be that the analyst also treats the “text in the eminent sense” or literature as “pretext”, whose singular linguistic appearance is secondary, what is more, whose communicative function is distorted, as it becomes important for him because there is something “concealed” and “hidden”).<sup>57</sup>

Here, however, at the beginning of the “invention” of the psychoanalytic method—though still mainly working within the cathartic method—it is not the often uncontrollable linguistic aspect of the patient's free associations which is of primary interest (neither for Freud nor us) but rather the way in which Freud, with

54 Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 60–1. The notion of “repression” is of course only later filled gradually with the content characterizing psychoanalysis; in any case, the word itself appears here already.

55 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition* 2, 8; Freud, “Studien über Hysterie,” 287.

56 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition* 2, 280; Freud, “Studien über Hysterie,” 283, emphasis in original.

57 See Gadamer, “Text and Interpretation,” 176.

an almost mesmerizing influence, steers the patient towards recalling and verbalizing memories. Though Freud usually did not cite either himself or his patients to the letter in his later case reports, here he does give an account in quotation marks of what exactly has been said. And this—whether what he reports has been literally said or not—is an important indication that the specific form of the linguistic-communicative process that takes place during the treatment, the specific words, and actual expressions do matter.

In addition, though it may seem obvious, Freud specifically emphasizes that a prerequisite for successful therapy is for the physician to take interest, in fact, to take *great* interest in the patient's inner process; that his—the physician's—personal, participatory commitment is essential.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps what is more surprising is that he must also feel unequivocal *sympathy* for his patient. If he feels the patient is “low-minded and repellent”, this may be an obstacle to the therapist's ability “to delve into the psychical mechanism of a hysteria” though in the case of other illnesses, this kind of “human sympathy” is by no means a condition for successful treatment.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the treatment may place serious demands on the patient if “[t]he procedure [i.e., the cathartic method based on communication] is not applicable at all below a certain level of intelligence”; the patient must give their full consent and focus their full attention during the treatment process (Freud often speaks in this sense of *Konzentration* as a technical term), and above all, must have confidence in the doctor.<sup>60</sup> These mental-emotional relationships are thus, in this stage of Freud's career, preconditions to successful doctor-patient communication and the “purification” of the patient's soul, that is, the “catharsis” that takes place in the

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58 Freud, “Studien über Hysterie,” 264: “Das Verfahren ist mühselig und zeitraubend für den Arzt, es setzt ein großes Interesse für psychologische Vorkommnisse und doch auch persönliche Teilnahme für den Kranken bei ihm voraus.” Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 265: “The procedure is laborious and time-consuming for the physician. It presupposes great interest in psychological happenings, and personal concern for the patients as well.”

59 Freud, “Studien über Hysterie,” 264. To quote this sentence in full: “Ich könnte mir nicht vorstellen, daß ich es zustande brächte, mich in den psychischen Mechanismus einer Hysterie bei einer Person zu vertiefen, die mir gemein und widerwärtig vorkäme, die nicht bei näherer Bekanntschaft imstande wäre, menschliche Sympathie zu erwecken, während ich doch die Behandlung eines Tabikers oder Rheumatikers unabhängig von solchem persönlichen Wohlgefallen halten kann.” Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 265: “I cannot imagine bringing myself to delve into the psychical mechanism of a hysteria in anyone who struck me as low-minded and repellent, and who, on closer acquaintance, would not be capable of arousing human sympathy; whereas I can keep the treatment of a tabetic or rheumatic patient apart from personal approval of this kind.”

60 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 265; Freud, “Studien über Hysterie,” 264–65.



communicative path, or which is at least initiated and facilitated by it.<sup>61</sup> Naturally, the doctor-patient relationship in this process is not that of equals. The doctor acts as elucidator, as teacher, as a father confessor throughout the treatment.<sup>62</sup> Finally, in this context, Freud stresses that the therapist must on multiple occasions use his performative linguistic power to “conjure (*hervorlocken*)” a memory picture, like a ghost, in his patient. This, of course, in a sense characterizes not only the bringing up of the memory picture, but the whole treatment: the therapist’s linguistic actions can thus be described by the acts of urging, interrogating, encouraging, guiding and influencing.<sup>63</sup> The consciously applied magical-rhetorical influencing and evoking power of language manifests itself in this, all the way to the consistent re-application of almost incantation-like formulas.<sup>64</sup>

Quoting one more sentence gives a most emphatic enunciation of communicative language performance—both of the therapist’s performative language work and of the patient’s expression of affects which it prompts—capturing the essence of psychotherapy: “For it is well to recognize this clearly: the patient only gets free from the hysterical symptom by reproducing the pathogenic impressions that caused it and by giving utterance to them with an expression of affect (*indem er die es verursachenden pathogenen Eindrücke reproduziert und unter Affektäußerung ausspricht*), and thus the therapeutic task *consists solely in inducing him to do so* (nur darin, ihn dazu zu bewegen); when once this task has been accomplished, there is nothing left for the physician to correct or to remove.”<sup>65</sup>

From all this, we may conclude that when Freud speaks of the helplessness of the doctor in the case of acute hysteria, he means, above all, the impossibility

61 The word chosen for this method, though we do not have direct evidence of this, is scarcely independent from a study on the Aristotelian conception of *katharsis* by Jakob Bernays—the uncle of Freud’s wife—published in the 1850s. This study, which advocates for the purgation interpretation of *katharsis* and was highly impactful at the time, is still often cited today. Breuer himself mentions Bernays’s interpretation of *katharsis* in a letter a year after the publication of the hysteria-studies (Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind*, 56–7).

62 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 282; Freud, “Studien über Hysterie,” 285.

63 Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, 265–69.

64 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 279–81. For a case in which the patient, during therapy, alleges that some disturbing circumstance is hindering him from working through memories, Freud developed the following, obviously oft-repeated formulaic response: “Ich habe gelernt, darauf zu antworten: Keineswegs, Sie stoßen jetzt auf etwas, was Sie nicht gerne sagen wollen. Das nützt Ihnen nichts. Verweilen Sie nur dabei” (Freud, “Studien über Hysterie,” 281). “I have learned to answer such remarks: ‘Not at all. You have at this moment come up against something that you had rather not say. It won’t do any good. Go on thinking about it’” (Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 279).

65 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition 2*, 283; Freud, “Studien über Hysterie,” 286, emphasis in original.



of making effective contact with the patient, a lack of communication, an inability to explore and re-experience memories, and the futility of their translation to language. *Danaidenarbeit* indicates the failure of the therapeutic effect on meditation and communication in the intense phase of hysteria. This failure, however, as Freud's exact wording suggests, will lead to a depressive (that one "will not be spared") feeling (or rather impression, *Eindruck*) in the doctor (*Der verstimmende Eindruck einer Danaidenarbeit [...] wird dem Arzte nicht erspart bleiben*). To fight against this impression of Danaidean work, perhaps one must battle defiantly with an equally Danaidean effort. Therefore, Danaidean work does not actually mean complete inability: the therapist must wait for the process to unfold, "and in the meantime make the patient's circumstances as favorable as possible".<sup>66</sup> Beyond Freud's own experience, Breuer's case of Anna O. also testifies to the performance of the cathartic procedure: the method can relieve symptoms during acute hysteria, or it at least "restricts the fresh production of pathological symptoms in a manner that is of practical importance".<sup>67</sup>

## 5. Proust

In *The Guermantes Way* (*Le Côté de Guermantes*), the third volume of Marcel Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*), the narrator evokes the figures of the Danaïds. To be more precise, it happens in the scene where Marcel, who sojourns in Doncières, is making a phone call to his grandmother in Paris.<sup>68</sup> The scene's gorgeous linguistic staging and interwoven reflections make it one of the most important examples of the literary representation of electronic telecommunication devices, exemplifying the performative power of the medium.<sup>69</sup> Introducing the telephone scene, the narrator talks about the miraculous functioning of the telephone, more closely about the telephone operators ("the Young Ladies of the Telephone") who put through the calls, about their invisible and magical activity. The atmosphere and the dominant image of the scene is defined by the supernatural, the spiritual, the otherworldly, the ghostly, and the phantom-like. When he calls the telephonist women Guardian Angels, the All Powerful, the Vigilant (i.e., Vestal) Virgins and the Furies, the narrator equates them to known

66 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition* 2, 263; Freud, "Studien über Hysterie," 262.

67 Strachey et al., eds, *Standard Edition* 2, 264; Freud, "Studien über Hysterie," 262–63. However, as it later turned out, the case of Anna O. could have been an example of a setback (Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, 247). Could the work of the analyst, or the "healing" of the soul generally be a real Danaidean task after all?

68 Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 86–9.

69 Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 186.

figures of the Christian tradition, ancient mythology, and the Roman religion. And as one of the elements of the metaphorical line of identifications, he writes: “the Danaids of the Unseen who without ceasing empty, fill, transmit the urns of sound (*les Danaïdes de l’invisible qui sans cesse vident, remplissent, se transmettent les urnes des sons*)”.<sup>70</sup>

According to the image, the Danaids correspond to the telephonist women, and the sounds they transmit (*sons*, that is, not exclusively human voices) correspond to the ash, which, as the Danaids do with pitchers of water from the Lethe, they empty from the urns, then refill and pass amongst each other.<sup>71</sup> Regarding sound as ash, Tibor Bónus, who gives a detailed interpretation of the scene, notes that it fits the isotope of the fire/burning/ash, which had been correlated to sound several times in an earlier part of the third volume, more specifically to the voice of the actress Berma, who plays Phaedra (once again, a mythical figure).<sup>72</sup> Fire and sound are connected by their self-destructive nature, supplemented by the characteristics of radical temporality, momentary origin and the passing of sound.<sup>73</sup> The ashes also foretell the death of the grandmother, which the narrator recounts in the same volume, and this idea of transmitted—that is, technically transmitted—sound is inscribed into the aporetic relationships of presence and absence, nearness and distance, life and death, into “the chiasmatically interwoven opposition of life and death”,<sup>74</sup> as is the idea of telephone calls as conversations with the dead or at least with after-life. The Proustian narrator’s own knowledge of this foreshadowing is evident in the

70 Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 87; Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* II, 133.

71 The French *urne*, as with the English *urn*, does not only mean a ‘vessel for the ashes of a deceased person,’ but, amongst others, *vase*, and this meaning can certainly be linked, even directly, to the Danaids. Even when, with Proust in this place, inferring from a wider context (more on this soon), the meaning ‘vessel for the remnants of a deceased person’ may resonate more strongly. In Roman poetry, the word *urna*, which also means vase and urn in Latin, occurs several times in connection with the Danaids. In Horace (*Carm.* III. 11. 22–23), as I have previously mentioned, Orpheus’s underworldly song makes the dry pitchers stop for a moment in the hands of Danaus’s daughters (*stetit urna paulum / sicca*—the *dry pitcher* can also evoke other images). In Ovid, also as a result of the magical singing of Orpheus in his descent to the Underworld, *urnisque vacarunt / Belides*, literally: “Belides were without their urns” (*Metamorphoses* X. 43–44), where the verb *vaco* is grammatically connected to the girls themselves but it may also refer to the *vacant* pitchers. Nor is it a mere coincidence that the name “Belides” is used to identify the Danaids, since Belus (Belos) is the common ancestor who is one of the grandfathers of the daughters of Danaus and the sons of Aegyptus, who they had killed.

72 Bónus, “Érzékek heterogenitása,” 311, 314, 325–26. An abridged and comparative English version of the study: Bónus, “Heterogeneity of Senses”; the Hungarian version will hereafter be referenced.

73 Bónus, “Érzékek heterogenitása,” 313, 314, 319, 323, 325 and 326.

74 Bónus, “Érzékek heterogenitása,” 316.

explained reflections and the language surrounding the telephone conversation and his grandmother's death.<sup>75</sup>

The motifs of presence and absence, nearness and distance, and, relatedly, life and death are entwined in a variety of ways and in great richness in the telephone scene as well as in the parts preceding the death of the grandmother. Invisibility in this network is not only a feature of the telephonist women as Danaïds (*les Danaïdes de l'invisible*—they are also the invisible, solely audible mediums of this invisible world), but also a signifier of distance, of non-presence and of death (which is anticipated by the *present absence* in the phone conversation). In the nexus of Greek mythology, the momentum of invisibility is strongly connected (linguistically as well) to Hades and the realm of Death (*Ha(i)dēs* and *Aidēs*, cf. *aidēs*, invisible). Proust exploits these relationships countless times. Let me quote a passage where not only presence and absence, but also the motif of invisibility and Hades, as well as the image of lips turned to ash are condensed in the text.

It is she, it is her voice that is speaking, that is there. But how remote it is! How often have I been unable to listen without anguish, as though, confronted by the impossibility of seeing, except after long hours of journeying, her whose voice has been so close to my ear, I felt more clearly the sham and illusion of meetings apparently most pleasant, and at what a distance we may be from the people we love at the moment when it seems that we have only to stretch out our hand to seize and hold them. A real presence (*présence réelle*) indeed that voice so near—in actual separation. But a premonition also of an eternal separation! Over and again, as I listened in this way, without seeing her who spoke to me from so far away (*sans voir celle qui me parlait de si loin*), it has seemed to me that the voice was crying to me from depths out of which one does not rise again, (*il m'a semblé que cette voix clamait des profondeurs d'où l'on ne remonte pas*), and I have known the anxiety that was one day to wring my heart when a voice should thus return (alone, and attached no longer to a body which I was never more to see), to murmur, in my ear, words I would fain have kissed as they issued from lips for ever turned to dust (*que j'aurais voulu embrasser au passage sur des lèvres à jamais en poussière*).<sup>76</sup>

75 And not only him, but many others in the age (Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 187) including Mihály Babits, whose poem *The Dance of Death* closes with a stanza on a phone call from death apostrophized: “How do I know you will come? / you told me through the phone. / Your own journey through my soul / you have known all along. / I was roused many nights by / the sound of your telephone: / in my left ear piercingly / the frightening bell rang: *Hello! Death! (Halló! Halál!)*” For the relevant perspectives of the poem, see also Konkoly, “Halál, telefon és hang.”

76 Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 87; Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* II, 134.

A voice brought close and made present by the telephone, while at the same time and just as “presently” referring to a distance and an absence, therefore refers to death: there are strong parallels to all this, along with the descent, the downward movement ending in disappearance, in the chapter on the grandmother’s death, now primarily in relation to death.<sup>77</sup>

At the end of the passage, similarly to the metaphorical identification of the telephonist women, we can notice Christian and Greek hypotexts. The “real presence (*présence réelle*)” refers to the theological and liturgical terminology of the *Eucharist*, Christ’s real presence embodied in the bread and wine.<sup>78</sup> The voice crying (*clamait*) from the depths is a Biblical (and Baudelaireian<sup>79</sup>) allusion (*Psalms* 130,1: Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord) which evokes the chiasm of death already present in life, and of life already present in death.

This is then followed by the construct “out of which one does not rise again (*d’où l’on ne remonte pas*)”, which, for someone familiar with Greek poetry, irresistibly evokes—because it literally cites—the famous poem of Anacreon (No. 50. in Page’s *Poetae Melici Graeci* edition).<sup>80</sup> The poem’s end reads as follows: “And so I often make my moan for fear of the Underworld. For dire is the dark hold of death (*Aideō*), and grievous the way down thither; and more, ’tis sure that once down there’s no coming up” (trans. J. M. Edmonds). These are the last one and a half lines in the Greek version: *kai gar hetoimon / katabanti mē anabēnai*, that is, *for it is to be expected that he who goes down once shall not come up*. The lyrical condensation of the original is clearly unattainable and untranslatable, not only syntactically (the unparalleled solidity of the *infinitivus* and the *participium* depending on the *heteroimon*, are something like: “the descending has no ascent”) and because of its morphological and semantic density, since, in the last line, movement is referred

77 “She was not yet dead. I was already alone” (Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 202). “...in the cab in which my grandmother was apparently seated she had seemed to be foundering, (*elle était apparue sombrant*), sliding into the abyss, [*glissant à l’abîme*, into ‘bottomless’ depth, cf. Greek *a-byssos*, Latin *abyssus*]... She had appeared, although she was still by my side, submerged in that unknown world somewhere (*Elle était apparue, bien qu’à côté de moi, plongée dans ce monde inconnu*)...” (Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 204, translation modified; Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* II, 316.) “A woman sees herself dying, in these cases not at the actual moment of death but months, sometimes years before, when death has hideously come to dwell in her. The sufferer makes the acquaintance of the stranger whom she hears coming and going in her brain.” (Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 204).

78 Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 196.

79 Bónus (“Érzékek heterogenitása,” 360) mentions here Baudelaire’s poem, *De profundis clamavi*.

80 And of course it could even evoke—though more indirectly because of the figurative differences—the famous lines from *Hamlet* (Act III, Scene 1): “The undiscover’d country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns”).

to in different forms of the same verb meaning ‘step’, ‘go’, ‘move on foot’ (*bainō*: first in the form of *participium aoristi*, referring to the single and definitive occurrence of the descent, then with the *infinitivus aoristi*), but also because the prefixes *kata-/ana-* indicating the *down/up*, opposite directions are particularly emphatic due to the *figura etymologica* of the two forms of the same verb.

Finally, at the very end of the passage cited, it is worth mentioning the return of the haunting, phantom-like voice which is now forever separated from the living body that voiced it (this separation, the parting of sound and body, always necessarily happens in life as well). The lips that have forever turned to ash will be given as the source of the voice left here in life, in the lives of others, as a remnant (*sur des lèvres à jamais en poussière*). Dust and ashes, lips and recurring voices, the ashes of the body and the urn of sounds—telephonic haunting: “Granny!’ I cried to her, ‘Granny!’ and would fain have kissed her, but I had beside me only that voice, a phantom, as impalpable as that which would come perhaps to revisit me when my grandmother was dead.” (Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 88). The telephone—similarly to other, more modern devices that transmit and record sound and image—resurrects the dead and at the same time turns those who are living into the living-dead.<sup>81</sup>

By linking this otherworldly testamental nature of voice—which even in this life is otherworldly<sup>82</sup>—to the analyses presented so far, the mediating performance of tele-phony as *tele-communication* that bestows distance upon us can be seen as bringing only a mechanical, technically produced remnant of sound that is separate from the face attached to the voice, and thus, from the actual presence of the speaker, the other soul. This is exactly what draws attention to the fact that separation is an ever tempting possibility of direct, non-machine communication as well, as long as there is a conventional, rather than a natural connection between voice and face (i.e., the person).<sup>83</sup> At the same time, the Danaidean task of the telephonist women, and we have seen similar ones in previous analyses, is not entirely futile: if the technical transmission of this remnant, the remnant of the self-burning voice, still allows for listening into the distance, for the voice of the distant other to be heard, it can function as a condition for communication and understanding.

Moreover, it is interesting that technically mediated sound, while moving away from its origin—from the singular soul that emits it (the singular face that replaces it)—and while warning us, through its technical realization, that communication has lost its private and intimate character<sup>84</sup> precisely as a result of the separation and iso-

81 Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 197.

82 Bónus, “Érzékek heterogenitása,” 327–28, 351, 359, 361, 363–64, 369, 373.

83 Bónus, “Érzékek heterogenitása,” 369.

84 Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 190.

lation of sound, has also become singular. As if it were to replace the lost singularity of origin and also to create a new kind of intimacy that had never existed before. The voice detached from the face, separated from the face as a mere visually perceptible mask (*sans le masque du visage*) and appearing independently, with its proximity (*l'ayant seule près de moi*) presents precisely the voice as something completely new:

but her voice itself I was hearing today for the first time (*mais sa voix elle-même, je l'écoutais aujourd'hui pour la première fois*). And because that voice appeared to me to have altered in its proportions from the moment that it was a whole, and reached me in this way alone and without the accompaniment of her face and features, I discovered (*je découvris*) how sweet that voice was [...] It was sweet, but also how sad it was [...] fragile by reason of its delicacy it seemed at every moment ready to break, [...] then, too, having it alone beside me (*puis, l'ayant seule près de moi*), seen, without the mask of her face (*vue sans le masque du visage*), I noticed for the first time (*j'y remarquais, pour la première fois*), the sorrows that had scarred it in the course of a lifetime.<sup>85</sup>

While the telephonic voice acquires the illusion of this mediated immediacy, it also reveals the illusion of the natural immediacy to which we fall victim in the presence of the visible and, what is more, tangible other. “The most tender proximity [this is Proust’s expression – A. S.] is an illusion. We are always at an immense distance even from those we are touching and embracing.”<sup>86</sup>

This peculiar motif of the telephonically-transmitted voice’s acquired originality and singularity returns even more pronounced in the telephone scene (recalling the grandmother’s voice) of the fifth volume (*La prisonnière; The Captive*), because it is accompanied by a reflection of generalizing tendency. Here, the narrator has a short conversation with Albertine’s girlfriend, Andrée, during which he comments on Andrée’s farewell formula (“It has been a great pleasure to hear your voice.”) from his side:

I might have said the same, and with greater truth than Andrée, for I had been infinitely sensible for the sound of her voice, having never before noticed that it was so different from the voices of other people (*car je venais d'être infiniment sensible à sa voix, n'ayant jamais remarqué jusque-là qu'elle était si différente des autres*). Then I recalled other voices still, women’s voices especially, some of them rendered slow by the precision of a question and by mental concentration, others made breathless, even silenced at moments, by the lyrical flow of what the speakers were relating; I recalled one by one the voices of all the girls whom I had known at Balbec

85 Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 87; Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* II, 134–35.

86 Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 195.



(*je me rappelai une à une la voix de chacune des jeunes filles que j'avais connues à Balbec*), then Gilberte's voice, then my grandmother's, then that of Mme. de Guermantes, I found them all unlike (*je les trouvai toutes dissemblables*), moulded in a language peculiar to each of the speakers (*moulées sur un langage particulier à chacune*), each playing upon a different instrument (*jouant toutes sur un instrument différent*), and I said to myself how meagre must be the concert performed in paradise by the three or four angel musicians of the old painters, when I saw mount to the Throne of God, by tens, by hundreds, by thousands, the harmonious and multisonant salutation of all the Voices (*je voyais [...] l'harmonieuse et multisonore salutation de toutes les Voix*). I did not leave the telephone without thanking, in a few propitiatory words, her who reigns over the swiftness of sounds...<sup>87</sup>

This abundant, virtually uncontrollable, and “oblique” plurality of sounds, the sounds of voices, is made possible by the telephone, a technical device that we might think of as removing the soul, because it detaches speech from its source. The telephone also produces the intense experience of this plurality of sounds in the separation of hearing which can be observed not only at the level of thematic reflections but also at the level of a grammar which emphasizes uniqueness (moreover, it is interesting that the sounds—perhaps in order to show their plasticity, their taking shape—become *visible* to the narrator: *je voyais... I saw...*). However, the detachment of speech from its source is also an approximation and a highlight, a reproduction of the singular in its machine transmission. This new form of voice experience, perhaps the most powerful and enduring performative performance of the new medium, may be able to create a new way of perception and even a new kind of constitution for the subject, not only for the other, but also for the self: “Marcel's telephone experience points toward a different and even more disturbing hypothesis, namely that the self may be performatively created by the medium in which it expresses itself.”<sup>88</sup>

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the telephone conversation with Andrée, as well as *The Captive* as a whole is encompassed by motifs of love, lies, jealousy, the need to possess the other, the unattainability of the other, the torturous desire and the impossibility of understanding the other, and in this way, the motifs of presence and absence (as the motifs of the other's absence, inaccessibility and “intransferability”). The illusory nature of the other person's transparency is reflected not only in the inscrutability of Françoise, the family's maid, but also in the inscrutability of the narrator's love, Albertine, the mysterious and secret nature of her real feelings, sexual inclinations and behavior.<sup>89</sup> The detachment of love and knowledge, the

87 Proust, *The Captive*, 62, trans. modified; Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu III*, 101–2.

88 Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 194.

89 Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 181.



inscrutability of the closest, most passionately loved being, the fact that “we have no direct access whatsoever to the mind and heart of another”,<sup>90</sup> fills romantic relationships with a perpetual suffering caused by jealousy and which, on the other hand, is also based on this inscrutability, the alluring nature of the other’s mystery. And it is precisely during a reflection on the torment of the intertwining of love and jealousy that cannot be untangled, or, more precisely, on this ever-recurring intertwining, their recycling into one another, that the Danaids reappear in a later part of the text, together with the figure of Ixion:

“Jealousy, which wears a bandage over its eyes, is not merely powerless to discover anything in the darkness that enshrouds it (*dans les ténèbres qui l’enveloppent*), it is also one of those torments where the task must be incessantly repeated, like that of the Danaids, or of Ixion (*elle est encore un de ces supplices où la tâche est à recommencer sans cesse, comme celle des Danaïdes, comme celle d’Ixion*).”<sup>91</sup>

The *les ténèbres* here not only refers to darkness (because of the blindfold) and the blindness of love, that is, jealousy, but also to the Underworld, the realm of shadows, and the vagueness and impenetrability of the other as a shadow.<sup>92</sup> The impossibility of the cognitive act of understanding (and therefore its substitution with ceaseless projection, “imagination”) is connected here with the affect of frustration and jealous imagination.<sup>93</sup> Getting to know the other, their full possession, the

90 Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, 183.

91 Proust, *The Captive*, 93; Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* III, 151. The expression *sans cesse* (here translated as *incessantly*) appeared in the earlier description of the telephone operators as the Danaids (there in the form “without ceasing”): *les Danaïdes de l’invisible qui sans cesse vident etc.*

92 See for example, here referring to Françoise: “At any rate I realised the impossibility of obtaining any direct and certain knowledge of whether Françoise loved or loathed me. And thus it was she who first gave me the idea that a person does not (as I had imagined) stand motionless and clear before our eyes with his merits, his defects, his plans, his intentions with regard to ourself exposed on his surface, like a garden at which, with all its borders spread out before us, we gaze through a railing, but is a shadow which we can never succeed in penetrating (*une ombre où nous ne pouvons jamais pénétrer*), of which there can be no such thing as direct knowledge (*pour laquelle il n’existe pas de connaissance directe*), with respect to which we form countless beliefs, based upon his words and sometimes upon his actions, though neither words nor actions can give us anything but inadequate and as it proves contradictory information—a shadow (*une ombre*), behind which we can alternately imagine, with equal justification (*où nous pouvons tour à tour imaginer, avec autant de vraisemblance*), that there burns the flame of hatred and of love” (Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 45; Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* II, 67).

93 From another direction, Baudelaire may once again be referenced here. His poem *The Cask of Hate* (*Le tonneau de la haine*) uses the image of the Danaids’ barrel (which in the poem is filled with blood and tears—in Babits’s poem, with tears and water) as an allegorical representation

unfulfilled desire for love as wholeness is symbolized by the Danaidean fate, which is thematically and more strongly connected to the general interpretation of ancient versions of the myth through the erotic component, while keeping alive the problem of interpersonal understanding.<sup>94</sup>

In Proust's case, then, the figure of the Danaids again becomes a symbol of some form of transmission, the inability thereof, or of the ceaseless interplay between the two. On the one hand, it is the inner life of the loved one that appears inscrutable, inaccessible and intransferable, and thus, as the nurturer of jealousy that never ceases, which, at the same time, is also an inexhaustible source of love: an irresistible attraction to the mystery of the other. On the other hand, and above all, the daughters of Danaus become symbols of the technical transmission of voice and speech, and the impossible possibility of this transmission. The mediating work of the telephone operators, the passing of the urns of sounds, show the technical impossibility to display the animated present, the animated presence of voice, and may also refer to the unattainability of the full meaning (the "dead nature" of meaning) of the words said on the other side. On the other hand, this technical, telephonic transmission is capable of something which goes beyond the capabilities of conventionally hearing the animated and present voice (and illusorily assigning to it a face and soul): in its unrivalled plasticity, it makes the distant present, and the detached and mechanically transmitted, singular.

## 6. Conclusion

An ambiguity similar to that observed in Proust's work is discovered in the texts of Babits, Nietzsche and Freud. Babits's poem performs the song of the Danaids while meta-poetically staging the failure of personal and cultural (literary) memory. At the same time, in *The Danaids*, the modern crisis of language and memory—as personal memory and as tradition –, the feeling of exhaustion of the classical poetic

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of the inexhaustibility and dissatisfaction of the affect. For Baudelaire's references to ancient literature, see Macfarlane, "Baudelaire's Revaluation," especially for *Le tonneau de la haine*, 434–35.

94 It is worth mentioning another possible preimage, where the semantic chain of love–desire–fulfilment/unfulfilment emerges with the inclusion of the Danaids' myth. In the already quoted *carmen* III. 11. Horace asks the lyre maker Mercurius for help with songwriting in order to win over Lyde, who is reluctant to love the poet. The magical-performative power of the song turning into romance is fulfilled in the second half of the poem by the mention of the Danaids, which the lyrical self gives into the service of persuasion partly as a threat to the daughters' underworldly atonement, and partly as a model of the only daughter of Danaus who spared her husband, Hypermetra. The last four sections of the poem later became a direct model of Ovid's relevant letter in *Heroides* (XIV).

heritage is expressed in the reinvented and recycled words and figurations of the same language and poetic tradition. Nietzsche identifies the work of the philologists with the work of the Danaids, though the activities of the philologists do not end with the action of meaningless and futile repetition. Rather, the work of the Danaids and the philologists becomes a symbol of infinite interpretation, which is done on both the exhaustible and inexhaustible material of antiquity. Linguistic interaction with the patient plays a crucial role in the psychotherapy of the early Freud, moving away from the cathartic method to de facto psychoanalysis. In the process of reminding the patient through the communication and verbalization of memories, the term *Danaidenarbeit* refers to the impossibility of effective influence in the intense phase of hysteria. However, this impossibility is not complete if the therapist, even during the phase of acute hysteria, is able to alleviate the symptoms of the illness and inhibit their reproduction. Finally, as we saw in the last section, the Danaidean task of Proust's telephonist women is not entirely hopeless either: they are able to convey the remnants of voice, even if it is merely a remnant of a technically reproduced or transformed human voice, the ash of the living and self-burning voice that is still mysteriously, and in some sense, on its own, able to be singular. In any case, within the work of these four authors, the mediation and communication are far from the illusion of any directness or totality.

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