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Crowd Scenes in Péter Nádas's *Parallel Stories*

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Abstract. The article examines the representation of the crowd in Péter Nádas's *Parallel Stories*. In the plot, there are multiple scenes including the masses that highlight different features of the phenomenon. I argue that the 1956 Hungarian Revolution appears in the novel as a fundamental experience of society, influencing the nature of people's gatherings even after its defeat. Firstly, I show that the characteristics of the swarm appear in the cooperation of people foraging for food during the revolution. However, the bread queue represents the extreme behaviour and the aggression of the acquisitive masses, whose collective action is always directed at acquiring something. Thereafter, I examine the representations of crowd panic in the basement scene of the 1956 cannonade and of the 1957 railway station gathering. Finally, I scrutinise two scenes with the seemingly liberated and intoxicated crowd. The analysis focuses on the relationship between the crowd and the individual, on the narrative representation of the crowd, on its influence on the participants' perceptions, and the associated attributes.

Keywords: Péter Nádas; Hungarian literature; crowds; swarm; revolution; panic, 1956

Introduction

The representation of the masses in Péter Nádas's prose is closely connected to the depiction of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. The relationship between the individual and the crowd, the sensual experience of the multitude, and the sense of freedom experienced in the crowd are meticulously described in *The Year of Funerals*, a chapter in *A Book of Memories*.[1] The narrator of this 1986 book refers to the events he experienced in Budapest as "revolution", leading the literary historian and critic Péter Balassa to call the text the "novel of 1956" in his analysis.[2] Unlike the representation of the events of 23 October, *Parallel Stories* does not depict the first few glorious days and the liberating experience of being part of the crowd; instead, it exhibits the fearful and oppressive conditions of the struggle for survival. Speaking

1 Nádas, *A Book of Memories*.

2 Balassa, "Közelítések az *Emlékiratok könyvé*hez," 256.

of the essential differences between the two novels, Nádas explains that, in addition to the "revolutionary euphoria", the "unleashing of the mob" was also a fundamental experience of 1956. Given the fact that due to the author's conscious decision the latter was omitted from *A Book of Memories*, it had to be included in *Parallel Stories*. "I had to look at how the rampage of the mob was linked to previous events, to social and psychological conditions."[3] The author's statement makes it clear that although 1956 is the nodal point of the novel's mass scenes, the text evokes earlier events that are also part of the collective historical memory, creating connections between them and the revolution. In other cases, the memory of the revolution is present in post-1956 scenes that depict the multitude, reflecting on the personal and social impact of the tragic events.[4]

As the above-mentioned chapter of *A Book of Memories* has been thoroughly analysed from several perspectives,[5] I refrain from the comparative analysis of how the two novels portray the revolution. In this paper, I examine the crowd and group scenes in *Parallel Stories*, as they represent at different points in the plot the various features of the phenomenon of the masses. Firstly, I focus on the cooperation of people foraging for food during the revolution and the representation of the dangerous queue. Then I examine the crowd panic in the basement scene of the 1956 cannonade and of the 1957 railway station crowd. Finally, I scrutinise two scenes with the seemingly liberated celebrating crowd. Through the close reading of the text, my analysis focuses on the relationship between the crowd and the individual, the narrative representation of the crowd, and the associated attributes.

The Group Movement

In the opening of the chapter entitled *Tearing up Everything*, in 1961 Kristóf Demén gazes at the severely injured, mutilated survivors of the Second World War.[6] In the young man, who appears as a first-person narrator at several points, the sight of the bodies evokes the late days of the revolution, one of which he spent walking through the city centre to get bread for his family. The sight of the extremely long queue at the bakery leads some people to move on to another shop where they have a better chance of finding food. Since in the uncertain, danger-filled days of the revolution, which are different from the usual routine, movement is a safer option, Kristóf joins

3 Nádas, "30 éves az Emlékiratok könyve II."

4 Szirák, "Hitelt érdemlő," 555.

5 Sári, "Történetiség és érzékiség Nádas Péter *Emlékiratok könyve* című regényében"; Szirák, "Hitelt érdemlő"; Bazsányi, "és a forradalomnak most aztán tényleg vége volt".

6 In her interpretation, Viktória Radics shows that for Kristóf, the two injured persons appear as latent father and mother figures, in whom he sees his lost parents. Radics, "Kritika helyett," 665.

them. The relationship and cooperation between the individual and the crowd play an important role in the description of Kristóf's personal experience. Even though "everyone worked out a strategy", the first-person narrator notes this: "It was no good to detach oneself completely from the crowd, because that kept one from benefiting from the flow of information, yet too many people all together was also dangerous."[7] In the constant change of relations, a smaller unit of people becomes the appropriate and safe way of cooperation: "One shuttled back and forth between swelling and thinning groups."[8] For one's own safety, the individual's strategy is to follow the route chosen by the majority. Choosing the right direction depends on getting information about the current conditions, potential hazards, and threats on the road.

In the representation of group movement, the characteristics of the swarm, whose abstract model has been discussed in biology, technology, and mass theory, become evident. In his article, Eugene Thacker discusses the application of the concept of the swarm in different disciplines. The notion has its origins in ethology, defining the behaviour of "social insects" such as bees, ants, and fireflies. The significant aspect of this phenomenon, based on cooperation between individuals, is that fundamentally simple animals form complex and intelligent social structures, thus are able to solve complex tasks. Their activities are carried out without central control, and the overall pattern of the swarm is organised by interactions and decision-making within individual units. As Thacker points out, another important characteristic of the swarm is its dynamism, in which the spatiality of the route and the temporality of the phenomenon are the determining factors. It is constantly moving, acting, and changing according to the interactions between individuals and units.[9]

In Nádas's novel, the characteristics of the swarm are seen in the narrator's depiction of the group. It is important that the cooperation between people, as seen from Kristóf's point of view, can be interpreted as a smaller unit of the swarm. Groups of a similar size, forming spontaneously, depart in different directions from the crowd lined up at the bakery. "Sometimes one heard, without any official announcement, that something valuable was still available elsewhere in the city, and then an anxious, smaller crowd would start toward a new uncertainty."[10] It is the aggregation of these clusters that becomes swarm-like, as they try to find the safest and shortest route to food by mapping different directions.[11]

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7 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 475.

8 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 475.

9 Thacker, "Networks, Swarms, Multitudes. Part Two."

10 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 475.

11 See the description of the foraging habits of ants. Thacker, "Networks, Swarms, Multitudes. Part Two."

In his description of the collective movement, Kristóf identifies the people around him not as a *crowd* but as a *group*. Its members mimic each other's movements on the dangerous route: "we'd bend down, duck behind a fence, cling to an upturned streetcar, wait out the pause between two bursts of firing and then run across, bent over, exactly as others had before us."[12] Group cohesion is also demonstrated in the narrative technique: in addition to Kristóf's singular first-person point of view, the first-person plural is used to describe common activities: "we could see", "[a] few of us were still waiting", "[t]his told us", "[w]e couldn't see or hear anything".[13] Through these shifts in the grammatical person, the text expresses that individual thinking and situational judgement are at work, while mutual assistance, shared decision-making, and joint movement between group members also occur. Thus, contrary to the claims of classical crowd theories,[14] in this community the individual does not lose much of his abilities and conscience, nor does he mentally and morally sink to a lower level. Indeed, the importance of personal interest and survival even leads individuals to deviate from the functioning of the group. At one point, they face the problem of choosing the first person to go, a temporary 'leader': "In the end, everybody was waiting for his turn, but nobody wanted to be first."[15]

In her introduction to the volume on the applications of the concept of the swarm in different theoretical fields, Eva Horn states that the internal logic of the swarm is characterised by self-organisation and self-control, which implies that it has specific forms and modes of unity, cohesion, control, and teleology.[16] Since the swarm is based on the interaction between its agents, it can adapt more easily to changing environmental conditions and can evolve as a living system. This feature makes it more resilient to the problems that arise, e.g., to the loss of individuals.[17] Accordingly, the members of the group in the novel move through the streets with sensitive attention, and their orientation and choice of the route are influenced not only by visual but also by sound effects. The narrator uses animal metaphors for a state of being that is highly concentrated and open to stimuli: "Maybe cats or rats feel things this way. … Even cats and rats know which way they should go."[18]

The sharpening of perception also creates an intense interaction between the urban space and the individual. Kornélia Faragó argues that the alertness of Kristóf's

12 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 475.

13 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 475–76.

14 Le Bon, *The Crowd*; Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.

15 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 478.

16 Horn, "Schwärme – Kollektive ohne Zentrum. Einleitung," 10.

17 Horn, "Schwärme – Kollektive ohne Zentrum. Einleitung," 11–12.

18 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 476.

senses widens to such an extent that he is able to "embrace" the city, thus interiorizing the space around him.[19]

> "Never before or after did I feel how deeply the city lived in me. Some need would specify a place, and right away I'd see my situation as if under a magnifying glass. I'd know and see what was where, what sort of corner, stone, recess, or hiding place I could count on, what sort of danger I might expect. Like an animal that knows every trail."[20]

In this state of mind, the focus shifts from working with the group to the close relationship between the individual and the city. Kristóf moves "[l]ike an animal that knows every trail"[21] and begins to plan his way forward through his mental map of the city. Although he walks alone on shorter sections of the road, he repeatedly joins smaller and larger groups and participates in the exchange of information. In the narrative description of the route, the city takes on lifelike qualities. From the burned-out tank, branches of a fallen tree stand out like horns.[22] At another spot, the "[s]treetcar tracks poked out from the pavement like dead spines."[23] The urban landscape and the human body become similar through anthropomorphism. In the interplay between space and the people who walk through it, the city's devastated environment, the ruins serve as a protective function for people: the meaningless objects on the streets provide shelter from unexpected gunfire.

The ad hoc group's progress reaches its climax at the crossing in front of *Nyugati* station, where Kristóf observes a passing woman in a turban. The first-person narrator does not recount his passage; the reader learns of its occurrence afterwards when Kristóf joins the long queue waiting outside the *Glázner* bakery. The dynamics of the narrative change: up to this point, the tension has been created by the group's dangerous movement and the question of reaching the bakery, but from this point, the long wait and the uncertainty of getting the bread are the focus. The danger of queuing is in the vulnerability of waiting because, in the days of the revolution, being on the move offers greater security.

Kristóf finds the sight of the queue circling the blocks paralysing, and calculating the time to wait seems pointless. The first-person plural disappears from the narrative, which alternates between Kristóf's first-person point of view and the third-person narration. This expresses that, despite their common fate created by the situation, people in the queue no longer form a unit: they are dependent on each

19 Faragó, "Történő terek és egzisztenciális térérzetek," 29.

20 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 476–77.

21 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 477.

22 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 478.

23 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 479.

other but are rivals at the same time. This paradox is particularly pronounced in the congestion at the entrance:

> "People unfamiliar with the psychology of a queue would think this the most natural thing; after all, it would be in my best interest. If people can't come out, nobody can go in either. However, everybody has to put up with a number of different pressures simultaneously, and this simply cannot be done in a crowd no matter how well intentioned a person may be. Rationality, a sense of justice, and crowd pressure must fight it out, and no individual has control over these forces."[24]

Access to the bakery is problematised because people's "animal instinct"[25] is awakened by the possibility of getting ahead. "Suddenly everyone tries to resist and push back against some of the pressure, people in general being well intentioned and sensible, but no one can overcome the treacherous designs of his own animal selfishness."[26] In contrast to the animalistic traits of the swarming groups, which consisted in the ingenuity of finding suitable routes to obtain food, the animality of the queuing crowd now carries negative connotations. The narrator uses other animal metaphors to describe members of the crowd: the people in front are described as "beast[s]", while those who push forward appear as "cunning foxes" and "leeches".[27] In the narrative description we see the debasing concepts of classical theories of the crowd emerging, which evaluate the masses as inferior, instinct-driven, and immoral. Early examples are the recurring metaphor of the horde in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,[28] and Wilfred Trotter's work on crowd psychology, which identifies the herd instinct as the cause of the emergence of the crowd.[29]

Kristóf observes the crowd at the entrance of the bakery from a distant point in the queue, from an outside perspective. The tension created by the transformation of people's personalities in the gathering and the squeezing of bodies manifests itself in screaming. "Their souls scream, and even the ones who do not do this with their mouths have a peculiar fever wracking their bodies because they can't resist the others' yelling and screaming."[30] The voices of the stagnating crowd play an important role in Elias Canetti's influential book *Crowds and Power*. The unexpectedness of spontaneous shouting can arouse fear in people, but it can also have a liberating

24 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 480.

25 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 481.

26 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 481.

27 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 481.

28 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

29 Trotter, *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War.*

30 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 482.

function. It can therefore reinforce unity between people, thus creating the crowd's own "feeling space", or it can tear the crowd apart with its violence and power.[31] The effect of the scene on the psyche is also expressed by the vagueness of Kristóf's memory: "Most likely, I screamed too; everyone was screaming."[32] The density of bodies makes it difficult to observe the scene. People cease to exist as separate individuals, they become a "human mass"[33] for Kristóf.

> "One could see only straining shoulders, backs piled on backs in front of them; in situations like this people have no faces, memory has nothing to preserve.
>
> I saw everything.
>
> I was standing ten meters from them and still don't know what happened. Back, shoulders, the white patches of faces.
>
> My hearing remembers."[34]

Acoustic experiences become dominant because of the difficulty of processing visual experiences. To the fearful screams of the people at the entrance, the ones in the queue respond with a warning shout: "And there was anger in this screaming pitted against the shrieking. The anger of self-interest and plain selfishness. If at the head of the line the inevitable happens, then I, here at the very end, won't get my bread either."[35]

The density of the crowd increases as people see others leaving the shop with bread.

> "Everyone could see that people were coming out of the store, and everyone strove to be among the ones to fill their places. And now they really didn't let anybody out. Lava must feel like this when it has to crack the crust of the earth and the crust wants to stay at the edge of the crack but still caves in."[36]

It is noteworthy that for the crowd the narrator uses the *lava* metaphor, a term that played a decisive role in the development of the concept of the *crowd* [tömeg] in Hungarian.[37] The poetic image is further reinforced by the "*warm* loaves" that peo-

31 Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 35.

32 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 482.

33 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 482.

34 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 482.

35 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 482.

36 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 483.

37 The concept was created by Mihály Vörösmarty. It first occurs in the essay "*Pillantat a Sandwich szigetekre*", where the term appears twice. It refers to the substance of lava, and its meaning is

ple who are trying to break out are carrying,[38] as they struggle to overcome the counter-force of the crowd on the street. Addressing the historical development of crowd psychology, Ferenc Pataki gives a detailed overview of the theories of the discipline that have approached specific crowd phenomena through empirical research, with a particular focus on crowd behaviour and modes of action.[39] The taxonomy based on these aspects includes the acquisitive masses, whose collective action is always aimed at acquiring something. The need to satisfy basic human needs is a compelling force for people who, in the wake of similar goals, quickly develop an impression of universality. The instinct of survival and the group/mass scale lead to self-exemption, a moral justification of actions that overrides the coercive power of existing laws.[40] Pataki points out that the acquisitive masses are typically driven towards some extremity by "the internal logic of events". However, the problem with acquiring things of a material nature is that as only a limited quantity is available, typically there is intense competition for them, and cooperation is only for the sake of personal advancement and success. Therefore, aggression and panic are frequent in acquisitive masses.[41] It is precisely these psychological characteristics that are emphasised in the narrative presentation of the crowd in the queue in the novel.

In his monograph, Sándor Bazsányi argues that the events of 1956 are not isolated, heroised, or romanticised, but are an integral part of the plot that takes place in the twentieth century. Thus, the social and political consequences of the revolution's suppression and the reprisals are also present in the novel. In the crowd scene, instead of the active heroes of the revolution, there are only the suffering victims, among whom there is no sense of camaraderie, only hatred, forming "a kind of atavistic community of selfishness".[42] Its defining characteristic is that each man expects moral behaviour from those around him, while he has little control over his own instincts: "As if each person had put reins of morality on others while the reins holding him were in the others' hands".[43] At the end of the chapter, the situation changes due to the appearance of a Russian tank column, from which one of the vehicles aims its barrel at the queue and fires shots at those waiting. The scene and

given in brackets as the Latin noun *massa*. The dictionary explains that in the original text, *crowd* [tömeg] is used here in the sense of 'the sum of the parts of a larger quantity of matter'. Benkő, *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára*, 961; Vörösmarty, "Pillantat a Sandwich szigetekre."

38 My emphasis.

39 Pataki, *A tömegek évszázada*, 107–9.

40 Pataki, *A tömegek évszázada*, 127.

41 Pataki, *A tömegek évszázada*, 128.

42 Bazsányi, *Nádas Péter*, 411.

43 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 483.

the chapter conclude with this tense climax. It is at a later point in the plot, during his car ride with Klára, that Kristóf reports the consequences of the shooting, his escape, and the fate of the others present.

The Common Panic

The destruction of the Russian tanks flashes up in another one of Kristóf's memories, where the congestion and the required cooperation between panicking people play an important role. In the Café Abbázia, the character recalls his memories of the night-time cannon fire of the 1956 revolution that he survived in the basement of the bourgeois edifice across the street. The café which was hit by bullets has since been rebuilt. Regarding the boarding up of the shattered rows of shops and the damage removed from the building, the first-person narrator reflects on the functioning of personal memory: instead of recalling the destruction, the collective sense of the impossibility of survival becomes dominant: "Because no one could have thought seriously that holed up in some unfamiliar cellar one would survive the night."[44]

In the basement of the building opposite the café, "on one of those terrible nights in October 1956 [, …] cannon fire on the boulevard forced total strangers to take shelter anywhere they could."[45] Being under threat and uncertain of survival drive most people to think, to act, and to stick together, while others concentrate only on protecting their families and isolating themselves in their cellars. Similarly to the search for bread on the streets, the situation in the basement yields the importance of discussing news and information together and calculating the necessary precautions.[46]

From the claustrophobic night Kristóf remembers the flashes of people suffocating from smoke,[47] the thumping noise of walls being torn down and the acoustic experience of quiet dialogues.[48] The collective feeling of fear of death and suffering is expressed by first-person plural verbs and pronouns. In the threatening circumstances, people are driven to panic, and the instinct to save their own lives appears: "Which is to say, backing away from suffocation. Fleeing from the bodies jostling one another."[49] However, the outbreak of panic is overridden by cooperation in order to survive. According to Canetti, in situations where the mass as a

44 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 453.

45 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 44.

46 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 453.

47 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 455.

48 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 525.

49 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 454.

whole is threatened, it becomes a "real crowd", and "people could flee together like a herd of animals in danger, and increase the impetus of their flight by the simultaneity of identical movements." Canetti calls this an "active crowd-fear".[50] Similarly, in the novel, people turn their increasing fear into productivity in order to survive. They begin to smash the walls and create a labyrinth between the cellars.[51] The basement, which becomes a space of trauma experience, is a unique area of communal connection and cooperation, which creates a link between the people of Budapest who lived through the revolution, hidden from the surface. "By the summer of '57, however, one remembered nothing of this, or at least no one spoke of these matters. Everyone was responsible for erasing their personal memories. Or maybe I couldn't or wouldn't remember."[52] However, like the rebuilt and boarded-up rows of shops, the network-like system of cellars loses its evocative function after the revolution is defeated. This period is now defined by silence; accordingly, Kristóf avoids the cellars and represses his memories: "The way this became integrated into my life was that afterward I never wanted to go down to the cellar, but when I did these memories did not surface; it seemed advisable to forget even the associated anxieties."[53]

Also noteworthy is the context in which Kristóf recalls the night of the cannon firing. In the café, in which he is driven by his adoration for Klára, the walls are covered with mirrors, which constantly offer the possibility of self-observation and of fathoming others.[54] Despite the crowdedness of the space—unlike the basement—there is no communal experience, people are isolated and observe themselves and each other through the medium of mirrors.

> "You barely stepped into the place and you were already facing yourself among the sweet aromas. And if you wanted to turn away from yourself, you saw at the edge of another mirror how, on the polished surface and in multiple copies, you were turning away from yourself, or how the waitresses, also multiplied, were waiting for your order."[55]

The exposure to observation requires self-control, a constant regulation of behaviour, which confirms Kristóf's thought about the general resignation of the survivors of the revolution, that everyone is preoccupied with their own life.[56]

The memory of the night of the cannon firing also appears in the chapter *By*

50 Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 26.

51 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 454.

52 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 525.

53 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 453.

54 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 457–58.

55 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 457–58.

56 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 456.

the Summer of '57. At its beginning, Kristóf and his acquaintance Pisti stand on the platform of a train on its way to a children's camp in East Germany, reminiscing about the traumatic night of the revolution. There is an acoustic link between their present time in 1957 and the events of months earlier: the sound effects of the rumbling train evoke the banging of cellar walls in the first-person narrative. "It was as though I could hear again the faint, even banging on the rear walls of the cellars. He was telling me about it as we stood on the platform at the end of our car in the speeding train; he told the story as I remembered it too."[57] The problem of memory is emphasised again: firstly, Kristóf claims that "[b]y the summer of '57, however, one remembered nothing of this, or at least no one spoke of these matters",[58] but at the same time, many recollections of the events of fifty-six appear in the chapter. The apparent contradiction is resolved by the German-organised journey, which evokes the *Kindertransport* rescue mission in the Second World War. For Kristóf, the possibility of traveling abroad suspends the everyday routines that people have adopted since the defeat of the revolution and promises the feeling of freedom for young people.[59] The journey is, therefore, an opportunity to recall and discuss repressed memories.

After recalling the days of the revolution, the narrative jumps back to the events leading up to the train journey and taking place in the departure hall of the railway station. For Kristóf, a crowd scene unfolds from the common presence of children and their parents. "I knew what I could expect; the collective dread would continue. Neither of us felt like wading into the crowd; I set down my suitcase at my side."[60] The crowd in the waiting hall is dominated by feelings of uncertainty and fear, as the adults have no information about how long their children will be taken for and where, while the police officers in charge give no precise information. The narrative slows down in the depiction of the situation, and in addition to describing the crowd, Kristóf expounds his memories of his family. The physical proximity of people and the sight of family members saying goodbye immediately remind the character of the absence of physical contact in his family. "In the huge, glass-covered sunlit station several thousand children and even more relatives were thronging and grumbling. Since my grandmother had died nobody had kissed me, nobody had touched me, nobody had hugged me."[61] Boarding the train and waiting for departure thus becomes a saturated time—evoking personal and collective historical traumas.

57 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*,525.

58 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 525.

59 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*,528.

60 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 529–30.

61 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 529.

The crowd in the waiting hall is nervous and hysterical, not only because of the lack of travel information but also because of the daily experience of post-revolution repression. "Everyone was still afraid that a misunderstanding might result in a lynching, as had happened to some secret policemen on the street in the last days of October and to anyone whom the riffraff declared was a secret policeman."[62] The children are almost forcibly separated from their parents, who are behind a cordon. Police officers and German women involved in the organisation of the camp try to control and calm the crowd, mostly without success. Kristóf sees Pisti again for the first time since the revolution and begins to follow him among the people. "I took off on a run after him as fast as the throng and the suitcase bumping against my leg let me. […] I sank into the universe, surrendered myself to a dangerous attraction, and no longer cared whether I was alone or not."[63] Immersion in the crowd and getting on the train can be seen as a crucial stage in the adolescent boy's growing up and separation from his dysfunctional family.

The chapter concludes with the moments of the train's departure. The position of the children on the trains and the parents on the platform mirror each other: both sides are characterised by crowding and fear of the unknown, as the destination of the journey remains unclear.

> "But the crowd would not move.
>
> Children hanging out the train windows were waving, yelling, and the long-complicated sentence kept echoing, maddening and incomprehensible. The throng of excited parents and relatives was now packed into the open space between the entrance of the glass-covered departure hall and the end of the platforms; they stretched, waved, and screamed from there, though it made no sense to wait until we'd leave.
>
> The loud bubbling of a dark mass.
>
> Outside, Baross Square was sizzling in the sunshine.
>
> Bullet marks on the facade of the glass-covered hall had been repaired in the first months after the fighting, but the station's domed roof was still gaping with holes, and the hot sunshine pouring through them in enormous beams created a veritable curtain between us.
>
> It was dazzling."[64]

The scene shows two masses facing each other, which can be related to the double crowd, studied by Elias Canetti, which maintains the existence of each other

62 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 531.

63 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 542.

64 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 542–43.

and reinforces cohesion between people. In this phenomenon, the sight or sound of another crowd of similar size and strength but with a different will can hold the crowd together. At the same time, Canetti examines crowds with opposing wills, such as men and women, the living and the dead, or opposing parties in war.[65] In the scene in *Parallel Stories*, the crowd of parents and other family members is juxtaposed with the crowd of children, thus generations are separated. The holes that bullets cut in the domed roof during the revolution are important for the site's historic, evocative character. Through them, the light enters the interior of the hall at a particular angle. In the metaphor of the *curtain*, the narrator identifies a spatial phenomenon whose fundamental role is to reduce the view in and out, and has a separating function. Thus, the narrator emphasises the split between parents and children, which is both spatial, as the trains are going abroad, and temporal, as the younger generation (temporarily) leaves the older ones behind. Those who have lived through the revolution as adults stay in Budapest, while the next generation moves away from the environment that preserves the trauma of bullet wounds. The metaphor of the *bubbling mass* reappears, suggesting the tension in the crowd. Kristóf senses the crowdedness of the wagons by articulating his aversion to the smell of the little girl sitting on his lap, which he thinks is due to her unpleasant physical proximity.

At the same time, there is a community of memory between the generations, as the crowd of parents suddenly falls silent, which Kristóf immediately associates with the shootings that are about to start again.

> "But the policemen simply grabbed one another's arms and formed a human chain that tautened against the fearful crowd. It all happened in a wink. The silence thinned, became ever thinner, and then snapped.
>
> All hell broke loose, because as the chain of policemen began to move, the helpless crowd's indignation soared, and the echoes reverberating in the hall sounded not like a mass protest but like an expression of dread and horror.
>
> And then something else happened that I could not quite understand. The police officers were desperately shouting something that sounded like a ritual supplication, and the crowd responded with shouts of indignation, but there was no strength left in the indignation, the crowd's resistance had no force at all.
>
> Over the next few seconds, people squeezed through the two open gates and away from the glass-ceilinged hall like filling out of a sausage. The giant glass doors flapped, creaked, and then slammed closed; the mute hall echoed eerily and now the revolution was finally over."[66]

65 Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 63–64.

66 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 543.

The police push the desperate crowd out of the waiting area. As with the crowd queuing for bread, the eruption of tension is again marked by screaming. Just as in 1956, when the screams of people in the crowd were contrasted with the warning shouts of those watching from the queue, in the situation at the station the narrator distinguishes between two types of yelling: that of the crowd and that of the police trying to coordinate it. The narrator conveys the helplessness of the people, the lack of a common will and determination, and the humiliating nature of the process through the metaphor of the *filling* coming out of a sausage. The closing doors of the waiting hall make the impossibility of continuing the fight against power clear. In his critique, László B. Sári accurately summarises the symbolic meaning of the scene, pointing out how the narrative embeds the revolution in a broader and more complex historical and social context:

> "The powerlessness of the crowd and the elementary lack of resistance seem to refer not only to the end of the revolution, but also to the decline of collective action, solidarity, and the symbolic renunciation of the future of children, to the bankruptcy of civil society after the end of communism in Hungary."[67]

The Intoxicated Crowd

Besides showing the disillusioned and disinterested public mood and the traumas that people try to conceal, two scenes in *Parallel Stories* demonstrate a different behaviour of the crowd. The title of the chapter *In Full Swing* refers to the self-indulgent, extraordinary state of pastime, while at the same time ironically indicating the frivolousness and unsustainability of such an attitude. In the narrative thread of 1961, Kristóf and Klára are driving around the City Park, while the young man tells the woman about his childhood and his family. The two characters are on their way to a party where a loud and unknown crowd of people has gathered in an apartment. The narrator clarifies from the moment the characters arrive that the conventions of everyday life do not prevail in the party setting:

> "[…] but here there was no day or night because the party had been in full swing for two days running and no one could tell how long it would go on. […] But that was the interesting and wonderful part of it – the anarchy. There were no rules anymore, and no rules meant no rules. When there are no units of measurement, there is no time either, and we can't tell when the reckoning of time stopped."[68]

67 Sári, "Egy anakronisztikus regény," 79.

68 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1005–6.

In the party, the perception of time is strongly altered, and the present moment becomes exclusive, thus memories of the past and the fear of future consequences are pushed out of the mind. The narrator refers to this state as a "wonderful chaos",[69] in which "people were celebrating a fiasco or solemnizing a devastation."[70] The relational categories of familiarity and strangeness disappear between people, "everyone was equally indifferent to everyone else".[71] This scene thus represents a new type of multitude in which there is no real community between individuals, no common goal for which cooperation can be established, but at the same time there is the sense of security that helps the characters to immerse themselves in the crowd of people they do not know. According to Ferenc Pataki, the category of the "recreational crowd" appears as another type within the system of crowd phenomena, alongside the "acquisitive crowd". Its defining characteristic is the breaking of the rhythm of everyday life and collective ecstasy. It typically emerges on ritual occasions, of which Pataki cites the world of medieval carnivals, analysed in detail by Mikhail Bakhtin.[72] This is significant because the party evokes the worldview of the carnival and the patterns of human behaviour associated with it,[73] the literary theory of which was developed by Bakhtin through his analysis of the works of François Rabelais. The carnival, related to the laughter in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, subverts the official world, controlled and regulated by the state and the church, and creates its counter-image.[74] As for the composition of the carnival, it is significant that it is exclusively composed of participants who *live* in the events, thus it is impossible to remain outside, to observe it from an external perspective. The universal nature of the carnival means that it breaks down the boundaries of space and time, that it is all-encompassing and governed solely by the laws of freedom.[75] Accordingly, the novel frames the party as a state in which everyday rules and laws do not prevail. Thus, for example, Kristóf is able to create physical and spiritual contact with Klára, who is a married woman in her everyday life.

The narrator identifies New Year's Eve of 1956 as the first occasion to cheerfully celebrate futurelessness. On this evening, people gather in the streets despite the curfew.

> "But on that late afternoon the number of people in the streets kept increasing and they were vociferous. As if they had a common plan for everyone to head to the boulevards. It was cold and dry, the sky heavily overcast and

69 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1007.

70 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1006.

71 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*,1008.

72 Pataki, *A tömegek évszázada*, 130.

73 Radics, "Kritika helyett," 667.

74 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 5–6.

75 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 7–10.

> public lighting sorely lacking. It was impossible to know where so many people were coming from in the rapidly descending darkness."[76]

The growing crowd does not demonstrate, it has no purpose. People only drink and make a noise, but there is no unity among them, "people were not yelling together; everyone was hooting or yelling for himself."[77] The spontaneous and rapidly growing crowd is similar to what Canetti calls the "open crowd", in which people's only purpose is to participate and be present in the throng. Therefore, this type of mass is extremely volatile: once it stops growing, it starts to disintegrate within a short time.[78]

In the New Year's Eve crowd, people become animalistic. In this kind of self-indulgent perception of the world, we also see the features of the carnival in so far as "a festive life" of the people prevails,[79] thus suspending the social inequalities and hierarchical precedence maintained by power. The "magic moment"[80] in which freedom can be experienced is precisely the end of 1956, the eve of the brutal reprisals that begin in January. The crowd, animalised by alcohol, shows its oblivion through its volume. "They shouted into one another's faces, showed one another their throats and fillings, whistled grinningly and tooted into one another's ears, spun their clappers next to one another's ears – and most of them were far from being preadolescent youths."[81] An integral part of Bakhtin's theory of carnival is the examination of laughter in folk culture since rituals associated with the carnival are "organized on the basis of laughter".[82] The feature that defines laughter is that it is not a reaction to a phenomenon but a universal state shared by all. It is directed at the whole world, that is, everything and everyone is the object of laughter, but it also carries a sense of mockery as well as joy.[83] This is the ambivalent state of New Year's Eve in the novel, which lacks beauty and joy,[84] but at the same time provides a temporary sense of freedom. The description of the crowd, still growing in the frost after midnight, is ambivalent: its density creates a sense of relative security, since "it would have been impossible to give orders to fire into the midst of so many drunken people", but at the same time, there is a kind of nihilism emerging: "And what if it was possible, so

76 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1009.

77 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1009.

78 Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 16–7.

79 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 8.

80 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1009.

81 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1010.

82 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 8.

83 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 11–2.

84 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1010.

what, who gives a shit."[85] The contradictory nature of the sound effects is captured in the phrase "the noise as well as the crowd's unbridled inner muteness steadily increased",[86] illuminating the tragedy of the senselessness of the gathering.

It is noteworthy that the party, in the context of which the memory of New Year's Eve is recalled, takes place on 15 March 1961, the anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, which also had tragic consequences. This time, the forced pushing and squeezing in the crowd due to the proximity of people's bodies takes on a positive connotation, as Kristóf and Klára establish continuous physical contact. As in the New Year's Eve crowd scene, the characters become animalistic: in the kitchen they "ravenously […] devoured the remnants, […] gobbled up everything […], [t]heir voracious hunger was real, the rest was a game for predators."[87] In addition to eating, the possibility of unbridled enjoyment of bodily sensations is reflected by the consumption of alcohol and by dancing, in which people "deliberately tried to shed their humanity."[88] In contrast to New Year's Eve, where people gather despite the extreme cold, at the party there is another extreme of heat: "It was terribly hot because of the crowd; in this room too everyone threw off their jackets or sweaters."[89] Similar to the scenes analysed above, the sounds of the crowd are dominant at the party, but they are suddenly replaced by a "grave silence" when the police appear.[90] "There, tension ran so high that the only reason people did not faint by the dozen was that the tension itself kept them afloat on the surface of their dread."[91] The muteness surrounding the sudden and unexpected appearance of the representatives of the authorities indicates the fragility of the carnivalesque nature of the party, and the fear and paralysis that prevailed in the communist regime.

Conclusion

In the scenes of the crowd in *Parallel Stories*, different behaviours of the masses are depicted, while each reflects on the experience of the defeated revolution in the background. In contrast to the inescapable experience of the proximity of bodies, which is the dominant aspect of the perception of the revolutionary mass in *A Book of Memories*, the scenes in *Parallel Stories* emphasise the voice of the crowd,

85 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1010.

86 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1010.

87 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1019.

88 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1021.

89 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1020.

90 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1031.

91 Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 1033.

the roar of the people. The masses in the novel are not in harmony, since people do not yell together, but shout side by side or in opposition to each other, even when queuing up, gathering on New Year's Eve, or forming a crowd at the railway station. In several scenes, this powerful sound effect is replaced by a sudden silence, expressing people's traumatisation and their fear of reprisals.

Although in the narratives the policemen and the Russian tank lineup are representatives of the repressive regime, the relationship to the leader of the groups and masses is not emphasised. While the vulnerability of the people and the threatening presence of power are palpable, in neither case is there a need for a leader, as Le Bon argues regarding the formation of crowds.[92] During the revolution, members of the swarming group cooperate in order to obtain food, but none of the equal participants stands out. At the train station, the struggling and helpless crowd surrenders to the power of the police officers due to the traumatic experiences they have endured. Freud argues that in this kind of panic, in the leaderless crowd, the mutual bonds that hold people together break down, everyone begins to look out for themselves, a sense of dread is induced, and people begin to disintegrate.[93] Although a certain negative or positive idea can create the unity of the crowd alongside the leader,[94] this is not highlighted in Nádas's portrayal of the multitudes. Rather, the satisfaction of basic needs (obtaining food during the revolution), the protection of offspring (railway station), and the experience of collective ecstasy (party) are the reasons behind the clustering of the people.

Cooperation and cohesion only happen in emergencies, in striving to survive, as shown in the swarming of groups in the days of the revolution and in people's attempted escape from the cellars. In the crowd scenes after the revolution, people's inability to act is highlighted, culminating in a carnival-like celebration. In the representation of the multitude, people assume animalistic qualities, the different nature of which also suggests changes in the public mood during and after the revolution. The intensification of the senses helps people who are looking for bread, but the animalistic qualities of the post-revolutionary crowd take on negative connotations, expressing moral degradation and the intensification of instinctual drives. The scenes in *Parallel Stories* are radically different from the unique experience of freedom in the mass in *A Book of Memories*, since the diverse depictions of mass phenomena in *Parallel Stories* highlight their heterogeneity and juxtapose people's different motivations.

92 Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 118.

93 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 45–49.

94 Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 52–53.

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