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**The Discourse of Deep Tautology:
Homecoming as the Code of Pilinszky's Writing**

*The only possible direction of movement is [...] -
out of the flesh, and that he rejects*
Ted Hughes: "Introduction"¹

INTRODUCTION

When reading, side by side, an authors artistic *oeuvre* and his other works on, or outside, the periphery of aesthetic judgement, both the analysis and its subject matter undergoes a recontextualisation. The deficiencies of such a recontextualisation are increasingly more pressing in the case of a poet as important as Pilinszky, who in addition to a volumeful of poetry, also left behind a wealth of essays, not to mention writings in other genres, all of which also merit careful attention. The overwhelming majority of the interpretative texts that are available on Pilinszky were born against a background of obtuse Marxism or a religious feeling hungry for spiritual food (with the latter possibly being, in Hungary, partly a symptom of the power of the former), and thus they hardly offer anything else than criticisms of the poet's *Weltanschauung*, or more or less disguised confessions. Treatments of Pilinszky in recent literary histories using the ideology or rhetorics of newer trends

¹ Hughes 11.

of critical thinking are bound to resort to a repetition of the interpretative information, scarce and mediocre even in the best case, which these texts provide.²

This essay is an attempt at moving beyond the practice that is only able to contrast different species of texts on the level of corresponding motifs, in order to explicate what the poem or the poet has to say, to make the contemplation sensuous or emblematic, or to re-enliven the experience that served as a common inspiration for works in both verse and prose. It is, however, no exaggeration to claim that Pilinszky developed a prose essay of such uniformly high standard and sensitive meditateness, that many of these pieces became primary texts, while his poetry was relegated to the status of some kind of an illustrative *gospel of aesthetics*.³ I do not wish here to either draw from or add to the achievements of the few critics who, like Antal Kuklay, Péter Balassa, Sándor Radnóti, and, lately, Gábor Schein, have been successful in treating the differences of poetry and faith, although much of this essay is involved in an indirect dialogue with their works.

Before a detailed view of such an *oeuvre*, we can hardly anticipate more than assume that its internal structure can most fruitfully be interpreted from a structural, poetic and reading-based point of view, and the ambition of this essay does not go beyond trying to put such a method of analysis into practice. Since I am in no position to show, even approximately, the proportions of a lifework, I decided to start from the essays, and only bring poems into my scope very cautiously. For if one succeeds in accessing these interpretative spaces, then it becomes possible to grasp tendencies that are *not necessarily bound to genres*. The main landmarks of my reading will be as follows: Pilinszky's peculiarly *geometric* imagery, the idiosyncratic use of punctuation, especially parentheses and quotation marks that constitutes his orthography, and his paradoxes, which in my view are not imitations of some kind of a gospel style (as that only belongs to Pilinszky's own reading, but not to the readings to be given about his works) or rhetoricised mediators of religious contents. It is, of course, true that Pilinszky refreshed the (publicistic) mother tongue of his inherited Catholicism with an almost puristic sensitivity and patience, drawing upon, above all, the gospels and great figures of French Catholic writing. Still, as Proust writes, "Les beaux livres sont écrits dans une sorte de langue étrangère" ('Beautiful books are

² Cf. Kulcsár Szabó 73-77.

³ Perhaps the most absurd case of this loss of balance is Miklós Hornyik, who introduces the "epistolary interview" he made with the poet by saying that "Tersity makes up for the curtness of his answers: they convey Pilinszky's poetic creed and world to even those who have not read his poems" (B 24).

written in a sort of foreign tongue').⁴ If we can accept Gábor Schein's parenthetical remark that "the phenomenological view of Pilinszky's articles and essays often does not follow that of the poems, and metaphysical dichotomies are often made more acute in the articles,"⁵ then special care is needed to prevent us from getting stranded, when considering this conceptual mother tongue, at the level that Pilinszky calls "szóhasználat" ('us[ag]e of words,' 'wording') in a disarmingly candid piece of self-reflection: "As my *use of words will readily betray*, art is of a fundamentally *religious* origin for me" (TK 75, my emphases).⁶

The foreign tongue of the points listed marks out a train of thought, hitherto not explored, that is implicit in the essays. This is what is called, borrowing Pilinszky's own words and inverted commas, the "aesthetics of the gospel" (TK 78; E1 182-184; E2 234-5), which is not the *kerygma of the aesthetic gospel* (as maintained in some, however systematic, summaries, of Pilinszky's thought), but a floating, meticulously articulated reading, a "narrative interpretation of a narrative, a way of finding in an existing narrative the potential of more narrative."⁷ In particular, we are here dealing with a misreading of the parable of the prodigal son, which is interrupted by ruptures, digressions, and recourses, and whose hero is not so much the son as the Son, or indeed the concept of *imagination*, already divided and differing/differing within itself ("creative imagination"/ fancy).⁸ Thus, this essay is not an investigation into the motif of the prodigal son, which is found in many more places in Pilinszky's *oeuvre* than will be discussed in what follows. Rather, our task will be to attempt to provide an approach to this body of poetic thought in its dubious status, dividedness⁹ and originality, a body not in the least diminished by its interpretative nature and the fact

⁴ "Contre Sainte-Beuve," quoted by Deleuze as a motto to his book *Critique et clinique* (Deleuze 7).

⁵ Schein (1995) 90.

⁶ For a more detailed reading of this passage, see the section called "Corpus" of this essay.

⁷ Kermode xi.

⁸ "When parable stretches out into short story commentators sometimes say that it has escaped from the genre altogether; so they call *The Good Samaritan* and *the Prodigal Son* 'example stories.' But that, in my view, is dodging. They are indeed parables, though as far from the pole of maxim or riddle as one can get; they are about to merge into long narratives, which may also retain some of the qualities of parable." (Kermode 25)

⁹ By this I do not only mean the dividedness in the essays, but also that peculiarity of the latent train of thought which fragments even forms intended for a more orderly performance. Pilinszky himself called attention to this at the very beginning of his essay "A 'teremtő képzelet' sorsa korunkban" ('The Lot of "Creative Imagination" in Our Time'): "The task I got with the title of this lecture surpasses my powers. I cannot undertake more than *a series of reflections, without a knowledge of deeper connections.*" (TK 75, my italics)

that it is precisely through finding its two Muses, Simone Weil and Sheryl Stutton that Pilinszky's art of essay writing *finds itself*, and becomes, with more and more perseverance and fertility, a re-visionary self-reading. As Harold Bloom writes, "really strong poets can only read themselves."¹⁰

0. KRISIS

... to speak about biblical relevance in works of art
is - tautology
Marcell Mártonffy, "A bohóc evangéliuma"¹¹

It is a misjudgement so say that the geometrical figures that play such an important role in all of Pilinszky's genres, in their emotional, cognitive and pictorial structures would represent givenness and rigidity, or in other words the already existing order of creation. Likewise, it is imprecise to regard them as analogous pictorial features, which are meant to order and classify meanings. Rather, their forming a sensitive and labile system and their trying to fend off mere repetition, are mainly the results of the dynamics of *homecoming*, a concept that was incessantly engaging the poet's mind and is much more than just a motif.

A much greater crisis than this is caused by an intertextual tension that touches upon the general possibility of the text: the previous existence of the Bible, which contains the stories of creation and the return of the prodigal son. This is, by necessity, concomitant with the crisis of the kind of criticism that considers works in the light of some previous work, and with the lapse of interpretative discourse into tautology, which repeatedly limits us to a perspectiveless regression and a hunt for marks of originality which could counterbalance tradition ("the same thing is already there in the Bible, in Homer etc"). Harold Bloom suggests that criticism could, by pursuing not the meaning of the works of art in themselves, but rather the techniques of "revision" with which they oppose the overwhelming weight of already existing masterpieces, find a way out of the dead ends of philology, boundless intertextuality and extratextual reference (which, ultimately, merely hunts for verbatim textual correspondences). *Revision* (re-vision) in this context simultaneously refers to the re-evaluation of the inherited and the act of (mis)reading.

¹⁰ Bloom (1973) 19.

¹¹ Mártonffy 13.

All criticisms that call themselves primary vacillate between tautology - in which the poem is and means itself - and reduction - in which the poem means something that is not itself a poem. Anthitetical criticism must begin by denying both tautology and reduction, a denial best delivered by the assertion that the meaning of a poem can only be a poem, but *another poem - a poem not itself*.¹²

Not even Bloom's argumentation can, however, escape vacillation, when, revising the dismissal, he finally endorses tautology:

The meaning of a poem can only be another poem. *This is not a tautology, not even a deep tautology*, since the two poems are not the same poem, any more than two lives can be the same life. [...] *Criticism is the discourse of the deep tautology* - of the solipsist who knows that what he means is right, and yet that what he says is wrong. Criticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem.¹³

This pragmatical dilemma is obviously also pertinent to a revision in modern philosophy of the concept of repetition which goes back to, among others, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Freud, but a meaningful consideration of this would far surpass the limits of this essay. Careful criticism, the roads of deep tautology from text to text do not, however, necessarily require such theoretical preliminaries.¹⁴ The question is, what kinds of interpretative processes does that "narrative interpretation of a narrative" inscribe in the programme of the "aesthetics of the gospel," in what sense is there repetition in it - and what is being repeated at all.

1. ITERATIO

Such iterability - (iter, again, probably comes from itara, other in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity) structures

¹² Bloom (1973) 70.

¹³ Bloom (1973) 94, 96. My italics.

¹⁴ "I am nothing but a critical pragmatist, [...] and any hypothesis is good enough for me." (Bloom [1989] 3).

the mark of writing itself
*Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context"*¹⁵

It is my assumption that answering these questions about poetics does not fundamentally require more than a detailed interpretation of Pilinszky's following statement: "I believe that all true works are, implicitly, repetitions of the story of the prodigal son" (E2 114).

It was Antal Kuklay's meditatively composed book that showed most clearly that Pilinszky's life work can be read with reference to the full arch of salvation history from the Exile to Homecoming, where the story of the prodigal son not only closes, but, when repeated, spans the whole arch. This parable of Jesus serves as a code, from a biblical-theological point of view, to both the entire biblical salvation history, and the New Testament, as a sort of "gospel within the gospel".¹⁶ It is not, however, just the self-reflection, or repetition, of a larger whole (say, the Holy Scriptures), but it is the repetition itself, insofar as it is a story of returning to the - partly - known, inhabited, homely, familiar. If repetition does not come from outside (for instance, as a result of the exhaustion of the imagination forced to take up ready-made clichés under the pressing requirement of innovative artistic creation, or as a result of some fashionable intellectual trend), but is inscribed in the structure of the New Testament parable, and if the outline of epics - or in general, of Aristotelian *mythos*, is shaped, since the Greek tradition and Homer, by the recurrent line of *homecoming*, then repetition is not only a topic, but also a mode of existence. *The subject of repetition, then, is no other thing than a repetition, that is, formally, itself.* Hence we can derive the formula that "*repetition has itself repeated,*" which finely displays the two definitive features of the economics of tautology, namely causativity and reflexivity.

The "true work" is then tautological, or rather, with an extension to include style as well, monotonous: "in art, as a rule, it is the meanest elements that are the best suited to evoke the happiness which 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard'".¹⁷ Monotony, for instance. [...] This means that all our states, without our altering them in any way, include the possibility of a decisive transformation or metamorphosis. What is more: the meaner the instrument, the more decisive the transformation.

¹⁵ Derrida (1977a) 180.

¹⁶ *Újszövetségi Szentírás* [The New Testament] 295.

¹⁷ *Isaiah* 64,4. "men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen," and *1 Cor* 2, 9: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard" (author's note).

"Blessed are they that mourn" - this is not only a religious truth, but also an aesthetic norm, a fundamental law of all great art" (E2 113). Among the Old Testament precedents of the overvalued stylistic scandal of monotony, one of the key concepts of the "aesthetics of the gospel," we find, for example, the monotony of genealogies - which is also the mnemotechnical frame of iterability - as well as the purer, more archaic form of tautology. And in no insignificant contexts. First of all, the biblical genesis of the aesthetic, the first poem of creation is a perfectly tautological word-play: "And Adam said, This is now *bone of my bones*, and *flesh of my flesh*: she shall be called *Woman* [isa], because she was taken out of *Man* [is]]." (*Gen* 2, 23; my emphases).¹⁸ "Man" speaks about the other in the language of the self (or the Freudian bodily ego), and this is presented by the text as *par excellence* poetic speech, since this is the first opportunity for man to not only give names to created things (as after the creation of animals), but also express the process of creation itself, and that addressed, probably, to the Creator in gratitude (this would explain using the third person for his partner), while granting the other one the gift of being the first eye and ear witness of such an event. Second, the self-definition of the Lord is tautological as well: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM has sent me unto you" (*Exodus* 3, 14). In opposition to the reflexive demand for truth of *theology* ("discourse about God"), this is the figurative and fictitious discourse of primary *theo-logy* ("God's discourse"), as far as this is possible in the tongue of men.

The innermost core of the parable of the prodigal son is the talk of the ego about and toward itself, a theo-logical *monologue*.¹⁹ The first moment of his return/conversion is that "when he came[went, travelled, arrived] to himself, he said" Coming home to the father is the metonymic extension and repetition of a motionless metaphoric movement towards the self. It is the reclaiming of the moment in which "with our rebel desire, we, as it were, split and moved off ourselves" (E2 13). The second moment is a monologue, the preliminary half of an imaginary dialogue, which, however, operates as a speech act: it performs the conversion already at the rehearsal, which has no audience (father) or action (homecoming). His words

¹⁸ All Biblical quotations will be taken from the *Authorised (King James) Version*.

¹⁹ The reflexive pronoun of Hungarian, *maga*, is thought to have derived from the noun *mag* (originally 'body,' now 'core,' 'grain,' 'pip,' etc.) through the affixation of a third person possessive suffix, and so the word would originally have meant 'his/her/its body.'

reveal that by “going” to his bodily self, he also repeats his sinful split-off (“riotous living”, v. 13):

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!
 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
 19 And I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

(Luke 15)

For out of his three sentences, all but the second speak about hunger and its extinguishing, and only the second seems to incline towards a moral self-judgement *as well* merely in order to obtain food. What is more, is there not a darker tone lurking in the slogan of “am no more worthy,” the tone of naked despotism: “I have sinned, therefore I do not want to be your son any more”? Rather than rendering the parable of the prodigal son a fulfillment that translates the Old Testament *typos* of the sin linked to eating (*Gen* 2, 16-7; 3, 1-13), this reading is a *stigmatisation*.²⁰ What makes Pilinszky's “midrash” of the *Genesis* ambiguous is precisely the fact that, although he does not of course rehabilitate the superfluous luxury with which Eve desires the forbidden fruit, he is still enchanted by the savageness with which the hungry man, like a prodigal son, grabs the bread. “Food is most material on the tongue of the man who eats, even in a sophisticated way, sated, out of gourmandship. In the mouth of him who is starving, on the other hand, food radiates out almost immaterially as pure energy or clear sunshine, even if the sight shows just the opposite, some very material picture: two hands clinging to the mouth, and a face and body paralysed into the spasm of eating” (E2 13).

The third moment is the actual meeting - or it *would be*. The father does not even hear his son out, who is only able to utter one sentence and gets no response; the father refuses to speak to his prodigal son, as his is the power of vision and action - prevention, speed, movement. On the other hand, the son's previous monologue is rendered truly strong precisely by its relegation into a preposed quotation, a repetition, whose subject (original) is on the wane (as only half of it is uttered), but its effect far surpasses the dimension it originally aimed at. The solution, I think, is

²⁰ Something similar happens to Judas in Christ's passion story: “As Judas eats the morsel, he receives Satan into him, so that the eucharistic bread appears in a demonic inversion, and Satan, the Opponent/Helper, is incorporated into the human agent.” (Kermode 92)

simple, and all the more ambiguous: the father's vision and acts respond to the son's monologue. The parable thus assumes a chiasmic structure: the son's monologue is evaluated as a ghostly, spectral dialogue that rounds off a string of events due later, while the string of events itself is perceived as the father's individual *tour the force*, an attraction.²¹ This structure is then solved or exploded by the virtual union and consubstantiality of the two persons: the parable is about two, adjacent but moving aspects of one figure, about a filial aspect, insofar as he sets out towards himself or his body, and a paternal one, insofar as he arrives there. This fundamental figurativeness seems to exclude from the parable any facile allegoresis of the relationship of man and God, while retaining another one: the figure of the other son might, in its relationship with the father, be an allegory of just such a reading,²² relying on linear correspondences and considering moral or salvific portions, an allegory to whose creation the father contributes with a self-explanatory naturalness: he has a good *conversation* with his other son. Whether the conclusion he draws will draw us into the feast of intellect, or will exclude even more (as parables are wont, we could add with the malice of Frank Kermode, who dedicated a book to this dilemma), does not become clear.

In this parable we encounter a work that, in its deep structure, is no longer a figure, but not yet a fable, and derives its poetic and aesthetic strength precisely from this fact, in spite of all other interpretative processes (placing "lessons," insertion into the chapter, the gospel). By "figure" here I mean an intertwining of God's enigma and of the metaphor of the body, the uttering or telling of which is ripened by an experience - Jesus's, the teller's - which, although never at home, will take, or drag along, snail-like, a certain familiarity, a homeliness directed solely towards the individual.²³ (This is in opposition with the communal experience of the Old Testament, which was kept alive by the poetics of tautology in the context of the home which had only been promised yet, the home to be conquered, to be in danger or to be recovered, but which can by all means be found and furnished.) But as Pilinszky, contemplating the Last Supper, says, the ability of this "bodily history" (E2 134) to be articulated is constantly opposed by its own "thickening"

²¹ Let us keep in mind the primary meaning of the word *attraction* as 'something that attracts.'

²² The motif "I am no more worthy" could serve to justify my claim. The fact that the incomprehension of the envious brother is no wonder, as he could not have heard this, nor did his father tell him, expresses that he *cannot read* this sentence at all.

²³ Schein (1995) 94. Cf. Kafka's modified version: "He is always ready to go, his house is portable, he is everywhere at home" (Kafka 41).

(*Dichtung*), whose strength is manifest in the fact that the paternal aspect has the power to act, to rejoice in the sheer existence of one of his sons, and to talk to the other, as if no sin has been committed.

And the reader - the latter son. Or at least the reading of "Apocrypha" ("Apokrif"), the poem that in itself serves, according to Pilinszky's own interpretation, as a code, is still in this phase, and it is questionable whether it can ever step further, as it is almost impossible to regard the poem as anything else than a paraphrase of the parable of the prodigal son. This poem, which, according to the testimony of the title, is resolutely destined to stay outside all sorts of sacred, profane and non-profane canons, is still understood to be a valid and "up-to-date" version of an eschatology canonised in its parabolic nature, if coded heterogeneously. According to this view, in the axis of the poem there is a linear narrative that can, although with meticulous effort, be explicated, and whose progress supports intricately coded visions and metaphors, whose basis is the Bible, and whose frame of reference is the experience of twentieth century history. Thus its apocryphal nature only becomes apparent when it reflects on experience that necessarily "falls" outside the scope of the Bible (or its apocalyptic boundaries). Consider the "fallen fields at the world's end".²⁴

I do not, however, undertake an analysis of "Apocrypha" here. Rather, I would like to discuss, with the help of a step-by-step reading, through what confusion of the "hidden roads" from text to text a biblical eschatology reaches Pilinszky's poem "Confusion," and how it joins at one point the repetition of the parable of the prodigal son.

Thus speaks the prophet in Isaiah's book to the promiscuous woman, symbol of Babylon:

Therefore hear now this, thou art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that *sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children:* But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and

²⁴ Neither Tótfalusi's ("prostrate pastures at the world's end"), nor Csokits and Hughes's ("the broken-down fields of the finished world") versions seem to adequately translate this line of "Apocrypha." Closer to the mark would be "fallen fields at the world's end."

widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy *sorceries*, and for the great abundance of thine *enchantments*. For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: *thou hast said, None seeth me*. Thy *wisdom* and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast *said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me*.

(*Isaiah 47, 8-10; italics mine*)

At this stage, sin has a decidedly linguistic nature: the necessarily monologic utterance of exclusive existence, in other words, solipsism (*solus ipse sum*, 'solely I exist'). What makes it threatening is not its exclusivity, though, but the fact that its solipsism is, strangely, not diminished even as it mates and multiplies. This is the real threat, the multiplication and repetition of the *solely-I-exist*. It is framed in the darkness of invisibility (cf. Wells), which only the voice of the word ("now hear this") is able to penetrate.

In his *Revelations*, John has this woman seated on a red beast with seven heads and ten horns, a beast which in chapter 10 sets out to chase the woman who gives birth to a son, and which is helped and raised to power by a dragon. The heads of the beast bear the "name of blasphemy" (13,1), while the woman's forehead has "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (17,5). John's woman does not speak any longer; she turns from invisible into visible, legible, while the sin of speech is automatically taken over by the beast.

and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world *wondered* after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a great mouth *speaking great things and blasphemies*; and power was given unto him to continue [...] And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou *marvel?* [...] The beast that thou savest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall *wonder*, whose names were not *written* in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they *behold* the beast that *was, and is not, and yet is*. And here is the mind that hath wisdom.

(*Revelations 13, 3-5; 17, 7-9; italics mine*)

John, who can see and hear at the same time, can only read, more or less, the woman, but not the MYSTERY of the beast, the enigma of "*was, and is not, and yet*

is". This is probably because the two are linked. The woman *is, and is not, what it is/was*: the doubling of the parturient woman, whose vision is a pagan mythologeme in the *Revelations*, is thus a blasphemy for biblical faith, just like the power of vision (in both senses) itself.

We find ourselves facing the task of filling in a monstrous time stretched between Death and the End, Death and Eternity. It can only be filled in with visions: "I watched and behold...", "and I saw" Prophetic *speech* is replaced by apocalyptic *vision*, projection and action by programming, the prophets' action and Christ's passion by a whole theatre of phantasms. [...] In chapter 12 of the *Revelations* [...] the pagan myth of divine birth fills in, with the astral Mother and the big red beast, the void of Christ's birth. [...] Her child is taken from her, "caught up unto God"[12, 5]; she finds herself in the desert from where there is no return for her any more. She only returns in the inverted form of the whore of Babylon: radiant again, sitting on the beast, ready for destruction."²⁵

The blasphemic wisdom of Jeremiah's Babylon wreaks its vengeance on John here, in the exact moment when, invoking the "wisdom," he starts explaining the vision. The angel learns a lot more about John when he sees that John, too, is surprised, if not captivated, by the beast, just like those whose names are not written in the book of life. It is precisely there that *John* wants to write himself with the help of his book, albeit he at the same time writes himself *out of* it, when he is admonished to do the opposite by his muse, the angel.

This is the deviation (*clinamen*) that János ('John') Pilinszky attempts to set right with his poem "Confusion."²⁶ While rearranging Isaiah's and John's visions into an absurd series that step by step defies all exceptions, a real sequence, Pilinszky retrieves the possibility of seeing through the trope of the beast's (monster's) blindness:

Through a non-existent slit
the monster's watching but does not see heaven.

²⁵ Deleuze 56-7, 63.

²⁶ Meeting St John for the first time was, in all probability, one of the fundamental scenes of Pilinszky's work, since he closes his first typical essay, published in late 1942, with the question: "And what has become of John's signs, which he, lonely, drew in the sand of the beach on Pathmos?" (E1 26). The influence on Pilinszky of the "woman covered with signs of blasphemy" was probably mediated and amplified by Simone Weil, whom he translated. (Cf. Weil 39 and 152.)

In vain it's peeping
 through the keyhole of the undone moment.
 That's why it's growing heavier
 and lighter day by day.
 Its seeing nothing
 stabs into the heart, even though the monster
 does not exist at all.
 None exists but me. Me, you and it [he/she].
 My God, have mercy!
 (transl. István Tóthfalusi, slightly modified)

The sin projected unto the woman/Babylon, and the beast, the utterance of the solipsism and the visionary projection reinterpreted as the narrowness of the vision of heaven, are loaded, projected on the self. *The confusion of the language deprived of vision sends the (re)reader of this language to rely on himself.* The monster of "Confusion," Pilinszky's counter-Sublime can only be an allegory of this. The two closing lines rewrite one of the basic statements of existentialism, a constant challenge to Pilinszky, roughly along these lines: I am the monster (hell), and the others: multiplications of my solipsism. (And vice versa, "If I'm not the monster, nobody is." N 79) Present in this is also the violently paradoxical insight that the second and third persons can only gain clear space by uttering the solipsism and excluding the others. They only become prayer insofar as they assume the judgement that awaits the beast. The monologue of the bodily self turns within itself to its other, God, as transparently as the monologue of the prodigal son. Kuklay Antal provides a reinforcement of this interpretation by having placed this poem in the chapter called "Exile" of his book, just like a fragment of Pilinszky's journal from the same period, which can be regarded as the narrative-meditative framework of the poem (N 139).

In his volume of poetry, Pilinszky placed "Confusion" before his poem "Difference," which reads as follows:

Between a centipede and a flamingo,
 between an electric chair and the marriage bed,
 between the crater of a pore
 and the brilliance of a gleaming forehead
 there's no difference. The only difference is
 if someone says, 'I am good,'
 or - which is rare - someone says 'You are good,'

but this is only such a difference that God says to himself:
both the same.

(Transl. Peter Jay)

Kuklay argues that on the basis of *Mark* 10, 17-8, the predicative “good” in the theomorphised grammar of “Difference” can only bear the third person inflection of the god that alone is good. The discourse of the first two persons, the narcissism of the first person and the eroticism of the second are alike misdirected, and the difference of monologue and dialogue disappears in an unconscious and impossible form of communication, the prayer: “*every human word is a calling of God. Because he alone is good, and towards him all feelings are directed, love and self-love alike.*”²⁷ Me and you: “*both the same,*” that is, tautology, we read here, in one of the rare italicised lines of Pilinszky’s poetry.

It is hardly possible to exclude from this formula the blasphemous arguments of mysticism: “*God alone is good. Therefore the true man is god,*” and “we can also serve God with evil instincts, if we direct our flaring up and the heat of our desire towards God. And there is no perfect service without evil instincts.”²⁸

A further consequence of Pilinszky’s first italicised sentence above is that the causative and reflexive force working in the repetition that has itself repeated is, as suggested also by the title of one of Northrop Frye’s books, the privilege of the biblical word: “And they were astonished at his [Jesus’s] doctrine: for his word was with power” (*Luke* 4, 32). The original text, however, reads as follows: “his word was *in* power.” This means then that we are dealing with a *field* of power, in which the story, “true” and “unsaid” at the same time, can happen. Parable can be the code of art insofar as it is the irreducible formula of literary meaning as power.²⁹ The Freudian analysis of the dynamics of suppression is the theory most applicable to the structure of the power of repetition. Comparing Freud’s and Kierkegaard’s concepts of repetition, Antal Bókay says:

²⁷ Kuklay 232.

²⁸ Lukács (1992/3) 148, 157.

²⁹ Both Greek *dynamis* and Latin *vis* mean ‘force’ and ‘meaning’ alike.

For Freud, the individual is constructed out of a curious paradox. The essence of this is exactly repetition, the fact that the individual is identical and changing at the same time, and simultaneously acts on ancient patterns and lives a new life that has never existed before. This paradoxical life could perhaps be defined as a repetition in the ethical stage of Kierkegaard, a repetition which *finds something simultaneously new and ancient, bodily and spiritual within the personality*. The Berlin way is therefore repeatable for Freud; moreover, it is sometimes repeated against our will.³⁰

The suppressed, like an uninvited, spectral guest returns and happens also, or rather precisely, if it remains “unutterable,” “inaudible,” or, as we read in Pilinszky’s biblical quotation, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard.” As metaphor can operate towards the re-casting or seeming removal of the unconscious, and against literal sense, through its operation it strengthens that against which it turns. Monotony, silence, meditative concreteness - constant points of Pilinszky’s esthetic thinking - are all forms of this unconscious inperceptibility, in which there is no complete knowing what exactly is repeated.

Pilinszky continues his ponderings on the work of art: “The moment of grace in that turnabout of the world, which always happens standing still, leaving externalities unchanged.” “Standing still” in this context is then a synonym for the repetition that alters itself unperceived. But how do we explain the statement that suddenly talks about the “world,” instead of the “work of art” or the “prodigal son”? As obvious from the section of “Bölcsőtől a koporsóig” (“From Cradle to Coffin”), the world is not a real counterpoint to the fictitious work - if anything, life is that. This latter text, the argumentation of which is reversed (in that it goes from life to art) starts out from a questioning of the “frequent metaphor” of circular time: “If it does make a circle, how so? Would our waning life return to the lost paradise of lost childhood? I don’t know. Hardly on the level of life. But on a higher level of existence? Many signs suggest yes. It suffices to think about the “closure” of great novels, which is partly a consequence of the fact that the ‘internal time’ or duration of novels gets gradually bent in the mysterious field of real events, and returns to the origin of its (hi)story without that happening literally. In a hidden way, great novels always follow the steps of the prodigal son, and lead from source to source and cradle to cradle.” Thus the field, or space,³¹ of the work, of the nonliteral event

³⁰ Bókay 47 (my emphases).

³¹ This is how Pilinszky describes his repulsion from a literal return in a real space: “Rotterdam was built ‘in one stretch.’ One does not immediately notice this, only after a couple of days. Which way to

is constituted, in contrast to the plane of life, by a higher level of the world or existence. Fiction and the novel move away from literalness as the world moves above life: the vertical expands and distorts the horizontal. Viewed from here, tautology, whose role in the last sentence quoted (“from source to source, from cradle to cradle”) is by no means accidental, is a parody of literal meaning.³² The track of the prodigal son returning home is not a full circle, but rather a curve, the curving of the linear time of life. Verticality and curving are united in the image of the “ascending circle” (in inverted commas), that is the spiral. The spacetime of the work is drawn by the track of the wonderings of the individual, solipsistic prodigal son. “This is a ‘circulation’ whose description leaves all languages and words stuttering.” Pilinszky’s poetic discourse is best described less through the (alleged) completeness of its metaphors or the sureness of style, than the “stuttering” of fragmented structure. This is why he talks about “imageless imagination” at the end of “A teremtő képzelet sorsa korunkban” (TK 79).

Pilinszky says this about “Apocrypha,” written - also - in the curve of homecoming: “The only basic formula, structure of the poem, which was instinctive at first, and then I became aware of it, is the discus held back. Turning. Revolving more and more wildly, and at the same time holding the increasingly heavy weight back.”³³ The imagery of the argumentation here draws the spiral in the conjunction of the circular revolution and the (vertically oriented) weight. The balance broken by the increasing (*field of*) force, the acceleration cannot smooth into a full circle (a homecoming), it can only interrupt the poem; “Apocrypha” ends, instead of a literal homecoming, on the note of the fragmented unity of frozen vertical happening: “a good handful of rubble [...] I am standing [...] trickling, the empty ditch trickles [is

go? The same ‘luxury’ everywhere, the same streets. I come and go, as in a splendid mouse trap. Like someone who sets out for *some place*, but always returns *to the same spot*. It is better to sit down and have a coffee. That way you can at least walk about, if only in your imagination, in your head” (E2 288). What Pilinszky objects to is the timelessness of the city, where luxury and *prodigality* prevent time from getting ‘bent.’ At another place he quotes Anne Hébert: “How many conversions sound forced in certain Catholic novels, because the internal logic does not justify them! [...] Poetry is not the rest on the seventh day. It has the bulk of the first six days of the world, it works there in the confusion of earth and water, on the battle field of life looking for food and name. Hunger and thirst, wine and bread.” (E2 103-4)

³² It is also the parody of the entire figurative language of poetry. Angyalosi describes the sentences of Pilinszky’s poem “Poem” (to be discussed later on) as “metaphor-caricatures, tautological statements” (Angyalosi [1991] 860).

³³ Lator - Domonkos 343. The statement is Pilinszky’s. Quotations from “Apocrypha” will rely on translations by both Tótfalusi and Csokits-Hughes, the choice depending on which version I feel more accurate for the particular passage.

trickling] down.” This closing interrupts: before or after the unfeasible return, the restoration of the beginning (“Once Paradise stood here”), between belatedness and waiting, or rather at a point that cannot temporally be connected with the beginning, we are facing the pattern of time curving between the sheer self and the created world: “I am standing” - “I am” - “creatures” - “wrinkles” - “ditch” (these words all end in -k in Hungarian and, with the exception of ‘creatures,’ also rhyme). Createdness (*creatura*) is the omega and alpha, between which the curve of time is being incessantly drawn and modified by the force and attraction of real happenings and (unattainable) creation. This mainly refers to the time of the poem’s reading, insofar as the relative ‘then’ of the beginning of the poem is at the same time pointing out the closing, which allows the closing to return to the beginning, forcing a spiral-like reading on the reader. According to the great code of the parable, “creative imagination” finds its way back to the figure of the self, which becomes increasingly uncertain and commanding. The self is the beginning and the end, this almost impersonal, dead, but still created material (clay, stone), which urges to write new works (to further bend the curve that divides space) and to read more, and to re-read the already written (to further bend time). This parabolical concept of the self might explain Pilinszky’s repeatedly postponed,³⁴ but increasingly stronger attraction towards intimate literary genres, towards the confession, the prayer, the journal (cf. his series of essays under the title “Egy lírikus naplójából” (“From the Journal of a Lyricist”)),³⁵ the note (cf. his “marginalia”), the autobiography, travelogue, the letter (cf. his “postcard” reports), not to mention a substantial part of his prose experiments (“Beszélgetések Sheryl Suttonnal” (‘Conversations with Sheryl Sutton’) and “Stabadesés” (‘Free Fall’)). The economy of the figurative power which was, in the parable, able to pretend that going away was not what it was (in the eyes of the son), i.e. sin, forces “Apocrypha” to pretend that there can be no homecoming.

Another technique to thicken closure into an unexpected happening is the apparently superfluous, tautological announcement of the ending, as in the case of his

³⁴ “Now I am turning over twenty or thirty pages of my intermediary life. The rest I will try to tell hidden behind cover terms.

[...]

- : Tell me, Sheryl, may I now say, at last, who I am?

SHERYL STUTTON: You may. But never write it.”

(P 123-133. This “novel in dialogues” ends with Sheryl *returning home.*)

³⁵ “in the case of ‘Egy lírikus naplójából’ [‘From the Journal of a Lyricist’] we are not dealing with a separate series, [...] - the whole of Pilinszky’s publicistic work can be read as a journal,” Hafner Zoltán, the editor of the new collected works, parenthetically remarks in his afterword to the essays.(E2 232).

poem “Címerem” (“My Coat of Arms”): “To complete / the sentence.” A parallel example among the prose works is the closure of “Szabadesés,” which seems to invoke “Apocrypha”: “And I am weeping with an open, stone-dry face. My weeping is millions and millions of years old, millions and millions of tons of water. This is the ending” (P 211).

The motif of weeping enables us to get closer to an understanding of Pilinszky’s poetics, which is conceived in terms of works relying on biblical texts. In his essay “Hogyan olvassuk a szentírást?” (‘How to read the Holy Scriptures?’), he writes: “I was pondering on how I read the Holy Scriptures. Not *interpreting*, I must confess. [...] Not interpreting, but contemplating” (E2 228). As the first example of this method of reading, he again cites: “Jesus said, ‘Blessed are they that mourn.’ If I start interpreting or explaining this sentence, in no matter how open a way, I will inevitably rob it from that for which Jesus on the mount uttered these words and gave them to me in eternal bequest” (289). By the example of weeping and mourning, Scripture-weeping,³⁶ the mode of existence of the Scripture as a text indicates the end of meaning-attribution and the eternal looping of reading. This modification of the concept of reading is metonymically concomitant with that of vision and eyes: “The most supreme beauty of our eyes is perhaps not that we can see with it, but that through them is given us the mercy and grace of mourning. It is not our eyes, though, but the eye sockets that weep, as if indicating that our weeping is the more ancient, the more primary, and that our eyesight was born out of the sea, and all our light is founded on weeping.” The emphasis that is placed on passivity (contemplation) and weakness (weeping) rather than active seeing liberates the difference of power between these two, which sends us, through a reading stronger than interpretation, to the event of a “blind” (cf. “our eye sockets”) rewriting of biblical texts.³⁷ “What we write is not really writing - only a more or less adequate reading of the pages in front of us” (E2 264). Likewise, the passage about the water of weeping is a more or less adequate reading, that is a misreading, of the parable of the prodigal son: “the sea is the ‘father’ among the elements. All water, rain and weeping are prodigal sons to the sea. The sea is God’s weeping, the infinite tear of creation.”³⁸

³⁶ This is an untranslatable play on the Hungarian words *Szentírás* (‘Holy Scripture’) and *sírás* (‘weeping’), which can be collapsed into *S(zent)írás*, or (roughly) ‘Scripture-weeping.’

³⁷ “A single drop of tear surpasses the most learned *interpretation*.” (E2 289).

³⁸ See also Pilinszky’s essay “Én Jézusom” [‘Jesus Mine’], at E2 294.

Returning now to the twin closings of “Apocrypha” and “Free Fall,” we can say that the self in the former, which “freezes” in the sun into immobility as a vision of God, corresponds, in the latter, to the way in which its photograph, fallen to pieces, assembles again in the moment when time stops. “Free Fall” has a dual arch: the coming home to himself is accompanied by a gender transition from girl into boy, or androgynous child. The same dichotomy is encoded in the stopping of the clocks before the metamorphosis: what Áron Simon, the watchmaker, “put together, was always different from what he had taken apart” (“Free Fall,” P 210). The mutually diversive networks of homecoming and sexuality can also be seen reflected in the poem “The Prodigals,” which ends as follows:

There’s a draught. Your father has forgotten you.

Boys return home.
Girls never.

(Transl. Peter Jay)

Kuklay has a twofold question to ask about “The Prodigals:” *“What would the parable of the prodigal daughter be like? Or that of both of them, the story of the prodigals?”*³⁹ The female principle of causative force becomes reflexive: in “Free Fall” it projects itself into a male photograph (by Klösz) and an animal mirror image (an antelope), reflecting, in this duality, the inseparability of eroticism and narcissism and the force and darkness of *eros*. Although the girl *“never returns again, because the force that carries girls, love, once squandered, vanishes,”*⁴⁰ the force beyond love is mightier than those who squander it, and, home-like, surrounds the prodigal squanderer. What else could prodigality be than, as in one of the apostolic epistles, overflowing abundance, or as Pilinszky says, the other, dark side of the excesses of divine love?

A simple juxtaposition of selected passages from Pilinszky’s six-line poem “Pupil” (“Pupilla”) from 1975 (which also provides the title poem of the last cycle of poems in his last volume) and Ferenc Juhász’s visionary epic from two decades earlier, “A

³⁹ Kuklay 26.

⁴⁰ Kuklay 26.

tékozló ország” (“The Prodigal Country,” 1954) should now serve to illustrate my point, that alongside a poetic repetition of the prodigal son and a restriction of vision and seeing, Pilinszky also attempts a revision of this influential predecessor of his.

Pupil

In the telescope a cavalry charge.
Stamens, stigmas under the magnifying glass.
But in my eye the yellow face
and plunging in the bolstered bed,
because to be human is
to see with a pupil focused onto hell.

(transl. Peter Jay)

from The Prodigal Country

and the runaway is turning in the dog-steam whirl of wide pupil-hells, tongues.
[...]
and his(her) mother bends over him(her), how strange, air and light are running out.
[...]
And once more vision rushes out on the pupil in a thick sheaf:
he/she/it sees, above him flashingly trembles the green carpet of fluffy-bellied flies.
[...]

Thus signalled Dósa's glance backwards to the indignant lord of the castle.
Oh, this glance, the pupil-void, in it the universe trembles, its deep hell smoking, [...] horses run in it, metal horse-shoes flicker, its dark feet-music thunders.
[...]
in the mane of his beard a little red-mosaicked butterfly struggles, spreading pollen.⁴¹

⁴¹ Juhász 23, 24, 31. [Translator's note: this is meant as a fairly literal transcription of the Hungarian, rather than a proper translation.]

2. INCARNATION

The very aesthetics of the death wish seems to make of that wish something incorrigibly lively. [...] via negativa, [...] craving for [...] a kind of counterviolence, [...] presenting models of "sensual speech."
Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence"⁴²

If we want to clarify how and why the family saga of divine persons gets confused in Pilinszky, then we reach the most difficult, most paradoxical and most blasphemous parts of his gospel aesthetics, and when interpreting these, we in fact must repeat and revise our previous readings. To this end, we must follow the confused family saga of certain texts (Genesis, the parable of the prodigal son, Pilinszky).⁴³ Pilinszky himself sensed how uncertain the territories he was covering were, when, sitting at his desk, he committed to paper the most important points of his poetics: "August was very empty and difficult. I had to write an essay on 'poetic imagination,' and my chief difficulty was that all along the time, I did not feel where the chair that I was sitting on was ...!" (PL 86).⁴⁴

According to the point of departure of this study, it is the task of "*creative imagination*" (in inverted commas), which is sharply distinct from rhetorical and combinative fancy,⁴⁵ to contribute to creation without wanting to create. "Artistic creation, in the strict sense of the word, does not exist" (TK 75). While "fancy is an errant prisoner in the thinner medium of the surface, in the libertine combinations of daydreaming," creative imagination finds its way home, going the way of the prodigal son. From this it follows, in the light of our previous analysis, that the

⁴² Sontag 12, 4-5, 22.

⁴³ In another great novel entitled *Emlékiratok könyve*, Nádas, who also wrote *Egy családregény vége*, says about the relationships of the protagonists that none of them can embrace the other in themselves, only a third one in the other. Bloom recognises a similar connection between texts, as he writes about Thomas Mann, Nádas's precursor: "Mann's Tamar knows instinctively that the meaning of one copulation is only another copulation, even as Mann knows that one cannot write a novel without remembering another novel. [...] Just as we can embrace (sexually or otherwise) a single person, but embrace the whole of her or his family romance, so we can never read a poet without reading the whole of his or her family romance as a poet" (Bloom [1973] 55, 94).

⁴⁴ The image is from Pascal originally, see Török 43.

⁴⁵ Pilinszky took this distinction of the two kinds of imagination from T S Eliot and Baudelaire. (Cf. E2 114, E2 170 and TK 75).

“unanalysable simplicity” aimed at, which engendered so many misunderstandings, does not mean literalness “in the strict sense of the word,” but its diametric opposite, but not even imagery, which is linked to fancy. Van Gogh’s paintings serve as primary examples of this: “on the one a chair, on another an apple tree, on a third a pair of shoes [...] . All of them are miracles of the ‘transfiguration’ of silence and monotony, boundless conflagrations and floods of standing still.” (E2 114). Such paintings correspond, in language, to names, and, in literature viewed as speech act, to the giving of names. For the poet, writing is the speech-act of the prodigal son, a motionless, monotonous, inaudible homecoming, whose main rhetorical characteristic is the hyperbole (cf. “boundless conflagration, flooding”). By *not* creating *literally* through giving names, the son institutes himself as a Father, the figurative sense of the Father. The one who returns “came to himself:” he returns to himself (“his body”) as his bodily origin, as his Father.⁴⁶ The beginnings of this turn are to be found already in the Gospels, since Jesus alternates in identifying himself with the Father and differentiating himself from him as the son; this figural (figurative) vacillation contains the possibility of (mis)reading the parable of the prodigal son as the story of Christ.⁴⁷ Pilinszky abandons his own explicite premises when he finally decides to treat the son, or the poet, as the repository of creation, while, imperceptibly but firmly, attributing a mere “*passive creation*” to the Father: “The maturity of the father is in renouncing all emphases, surpassing all that is still personal,” “obedient imagination can find contact with the absolute freedom, love, presence, homeliness and familiarity which which God chose the world” (TK 75); “it was the withdrawing Father who handed creation over to the son” (E2 233).

The task of artistic creation is then to continue the cosmic creation interrupted by sin, which can only happen, according to Pilinszky, through an aesthetic and poetic repetition of the *incarnation*, which is the birth of the Son, sin’s only adversary. According to Saint Paul, the incarnation, from the point of view of the Godhead, is an emptying, a *kenosis* (*Philippians* 2,7). This is interpreted in Pilinszky’s argument in such a way that *the kenosis accompanying the incarnation is enacted on the Father by himself*, that is, the Son is identical with the Father who empties

⁴⁶ “A strong poet, for Vico or for us, is precisely like a gentile nation; he must divine or invent himself, and so attempt the impossibility of *originating himself*. Poetry has an origin in the body’s ideas of itself, a Vichian notion that is authentically difficult, at least for me.” (Bloom [1976] 11).

⁴⁷ “The body, now gone cold and heavy, was at last taken off the cross and put into his mother’s lap. The fruit of her womb now lies dead in the maternal lap. The Prodigal Son could return home alive, but not he, the Beloved Son, who gave *his life* for all of us.” (E2 295)

himself and gives birth to himself as a Son, a Father who in order to become a Son creates a Father, a father-figure for himself. This induces a tautological duplication or repetition within the figure. "Psychologically, a *kenosis* is not a return to origins, but is a sense that the separation from origins is doomed to keep repeating itself."⁴⁸ According to Bloom, the equivalent of *kenosis* among the figures of speech is the metonymy; it is no wonder then that Pilinszky talks about the "adjacency" of obedient imagination, when it gives itself over to the mere giving of names.

Although I cannot expand on this here in any detail, it is highly probable that a key role is played in this phenomenon by the influence on Pilinszky of Simone Weil, who was filled with an anxiety about the impact of the Old Testament legacy.⁴⁹ "She handed us the keys to a new *aesthetics*, a new humanism, and a new, everyday, but still profound mysticism, which can be translated into everybody's life. ("Simone Weilről" 95; my emphasis). It has been argued from the side of Christian theology that Weil misreads the gospel in terms of the *kenosis*. A significant role is granted, in two of Pilinszky's fundamentally important writings, "A 'teremtő képzelet' sorsa korunkban" ('The Lot of "Creative Imagination" in Our Time') and "Ars poetica helyett" ('Instead of an *Ars Poetica*'), to the parallel of the eastern problematics of man denying god (Dostoevsky), and the western problematics of god denying god (Weil). The theologian points out that Weil's radically tautological problem constitutes a much graver scandal than the Dostoevskian one, who finds his way back to the Christian faith somewhat more smoothly. He "made up a certain 'dolorist mysticism' (F. Tillette's term). ... Undoubtedly, Simone Weil one-sidedly exaggerates the theology of the Cross, of *kenosis*, ... but ... she saw (experienced) Christ's love, which surpasses all knowledge and goes as far as the ecstasy of *kenosis* and the forsakenness of the Cross. [...] As she chiefly saw the negative in creation ('decreation'), likewise she only contemplated one side of the mystery of salvation."⁵⁰ Szabó also evokes a curious idea by Origenes, which does not seem to be far from Pilinszky's views either, and which claims that the suffering of the Son revises the figure of the Father in such a way that it retrospectively (cf. "the curvature of time") designates him also as suffering; the Son's death defines the concept of God as ecstatic. The reconceptualisation, in Pilinszky's essay "On *Luke's* Margin," of the sacrifice of the Cross as the tautology of the divine person

⁴⁸ Bloom (1995) 99.

⁴⁹ "Simone Weil, you never understood anything in the Torah," Lévinas says heatedly. (Lévinas 204; see also "Simone Weil contre la Bible" at 189-201.)

⁵⁰ Szabó 91-2.

denying god goes back to Weil. Along these lines, the dual symbolism of Jesus as Shepherd and/or Lamb leads to the “shepherd finally killing the lamb that he raised” (E2 134). The victim’s death, Pilinszky says, “dissolves” the vexing contradiction, and referring to the dimension of time, he writes that the words of the last supper are “the unanalysably profound and rich words of divine love and the ‘bodily history’ of man” (E2 134). The retracing of the narrative interpretation of the parabolical figure, which we have seen to be the intertwining of the enigma of the Godhead and the metaphor of the body, to the suicidal present/scene⁵¹ of the *corpus* is a tautologicval reduction that will not solve anything, on the contrary, it looses and opens up the semantic burden of the *corpus*’s self-contradictions. This also illustrates why the necessary precursor of the easthetic and poetic misreading of the prodigal son (and of course, of “Apocrypha”) had to be a poem entitled “Stigma.”

I believe that the key to the latent argumentation that unconsciously errs in blasphemy can be found in a self-revisionary parenthetic remark: “(Beside it [viz. beside “creative imagination”], fancy is the venial sin, the eternal infantile disease of imagination)” (TK 75). Fancy, which has been ushered out, returns through the hiding place of the suppressed, of the parenthesis; “creative imagination” cannot cleanse itself from the filth of fancy, if that is its own *venial* sin, a disease it can *never grow out of*. Pilinszky only has to refer to the handy doctrine of the original sin in his justification of the permanent “sin,” and “disease.” “With the Fall of Man [...] *our imagination fell too*, impairing the *world’s* reality, its *incarnation*, that final fulfilment and ending that was originally entrusted to our imagination within creation. Our fall reduced the reality of creation to the irreality of *sheer existence*. *Since then*, art has been the *morality of imagination*, the contribution and onerous work of the reality of creation, the fulfilment and restitution of its *incarnation*” (75, partly my emphases). But why fancy should be an *infantile* disease is answered by Freud:

When a child hears that he owes his life to his parents, that his mother gave him life, the feelings of tenderness in him mingle with the longing to be big and independent himself, so that he forms the wish to repay the parents for this gift and requite it by one of a like value. It is as though the boy said in his defiance: “I want nothing from father; I shall repay him all I have cost him.” He then weaves a phantasy of saving his father’s life on some dangerous occasion by which he becomes quits with him, and this phantasy is commonly enough displaced on to the Emperor, the King, or any other great man, after which it can enter consciousness and is even

⁵¹ Untranslatable word play on *jelen* (‘present’) and *jelenet* (‘scene’).

made use of by poets. So far as it applies to the father, the attitude of defiance in the "saving" phantasy far outweighs the tender feeling in it, the latter being usually directed towards the mother. The mother gave the child his life and it is not easy to replace this unique gift with anything of equal value. But a slight change of meaning, which is easily effected in the unconscious - comparable to the way in which shades of meaning merge into one another in conscious conceptions - rescuing the mother acquires the significance of giving her a child or making one for her - one like himself, of course ... all the instincts, the loving, the grateful, the sensual, the defiant, the self-assertive and independent - all are gratified in the wish to be *the father of himself*.⁵²

"Creative imagination" fulfils, then, a missoin similar to that of the Son who saves. The *ars poetica* of the incarnation as Pilinszky's *saving fancy* can be transcribed as follows: "creation did not turn out to be strong (immune) enough against sin, but since it gave birth to me, I repay this by trying to perfect it with the help of 'creative imagination.'" Summing this up, then, we can say that Pilinszky's argumentation turns against itself at two points: first, *it is not "creative imagination," but fancy that returns home, insofar as it is a "venial crime;"* second, *in the tacit realisation that the concept of "creative imagination" is born of - fallen, but since venial, surviving - fancy.* Fancy, in the Freudian sense, is *unheimlich*: too *heimlich*, homely, familiar, which is why its presence is imperceptible.⁵³ Let us read this again: "obedient can come into contact with that absolute [...] presence and *homeliness*, whith which God chose the world" (TK 75, my emphasis). The ultimate goal of homecoming would, of course, be Paradise, where Adam's "creative imagination" contributes to the work of creation through the sheer giving of names - "(According to Boehme, Adam spoke a language different from all known languages. It was 'sensual speech,' the unmediated expressive instrument of the senses, proper to beings integrally part of sensuous nature - that is, still employed by all the animals except that sick animal, man. [...])."⁵⁴

⁵² Quoted by Bloom (1973) 63-4.

⁵³ Bloom (1973) 77.

⁵⁴ Sontag 22. The relevant passage of *Genesis* reads as follows: "God [...] brought them [viz. every beast and fowl] unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." (Gen 2, 19)

We may now attempt to set up the series of revisionary processes, with which Pilinszky is trying to secure his own poetic existence against the oppressive weight of the Bible. Through the concepts of the Bloomian “map of misreading,” in Susan Sontag’s words, “outworn maps of consciousness are redrawn.”⁵⁵

1. As, in Lucretius, the declination (*clinamen*) and meeting of vertically falling atoms causes new worlds to come into existence, so the new work of art is born through a divergence from, or misreading of, the predecessor. In Pilinszky, the prodigal son (imagination) does not return (to literal meaning); its track is bent and declined in the time of “novels.”

2. In antique mystery religions, the whole can be reconstituted from a tiny fragment (*tessera*) of a vessel. The task of “creative imagination” is to restore and perfect, despite its own fragmentariness, (biblical) creation.

3. This can be done, paradoxically, through a radical acceptance of fragmentariness, through *kenosis*, the poet’s self-emptying, so that by emptying poetry into “*passive creation*,” or into the service⁵⁶ of repairing the irreparable, poetry would, by virtue of its passivity, weakness, contemplation and sympathy to those who suffer, help incarnation to come to a conclusion.

4. The homecoming of “creative imagination” is engulfed by its own hyperbolicity; it turns out that the Son is the return, doubling (*demonisation*) of the repressed figure of the Father. This also delimits the originality of *kenosis*. The Son’s text, the power of the gospel, which intrigues Pilinszky foremost, fades.

5. The poet exercises *asceticism* on himself: exposing his poetry to the danger of silence, he would let the gospel have its say through sacrificing literature - but *only* insofar as he immediately stresses that silence is the essence of the gospel as well. Whether one silence amplifies, echoes, conceals or simply repeats the other is increasingly more uncertain. Pilinszky takes advantage of this when he traces back the continuity of namelessness, unwrittenness to the gospel. “True, this unity and continuity is only occasionally called art or literature. What does that matter? In the real history of imagination, silence is sometimes more important than any written sentence.” (TK 79)

6. The poet leaves his work open to the Bible to such an extent, that it seems to be written by the (“author” of the) Bible. It turns out in connection with the time-curvature that constitutes the work’s world that “time is being written by an eternal

⁵⁵ Sontag 4.

⁵⁶ One of the descriptions Paul uses in his hymn on *kenosis* says that Christ “took upon him the form of a servant” (*Philippians* 2, 7).

hand, whose style far surpasses ours" (E2 263); "It is God, and God only, who writes: on the texture of whatever happens, or on paper" (TK 78). What is more, his poem "Introitus," following the *Book of Revelations*, also concedes reading to "the Lamb." The return of the resurrected dead man (*apophrades*) is, however, inseparable from necromancy, or, on the textual level, from the reversed imitation that the Bible is the poet's work.

It is the latter two phenomena, the motifs of silence and the dead man, that are left to be considered in what follows. I will start with the second, although the two are organically linked in the semantic fields we attribute to the *corpus*. In this context, the meaning and function of the *corpus* cannot be reduced to the *body*, which can be contrasted to the spirit and does not therefore permit a metonymical extension, or to the symbol of redemption, or any other simple rhetorical operation. Rather, it is so dynamic (*in-force*) a word that not only does it include its own distribution, but it also embodies its own interpretation; a methodological concept which cannot become pure metalanguage because it preserves and extends its two original meanings, referring, on the one hand, to the body of the crucified Christ, and on the other, to the whole of a work of art, book or life work. In other words, it is a *mana*-word, whose "domain of interpretation is many-faced, ungraspable, 'quasi-sacred,' and gives the illusion that it can be used for almost all purposes."⁵⁷

If "'creative imagination' [...] tries to attain an ultimate, unanalysable simplicity," and finds it, through its homecoming and iteration, unknowingly, in itself (its 'body') as its own father, we can talk about *sensuous* experience: "it can come into *contact* with that [...] with which God chose the world"(TK 75, my emphasis), i.e. with creation. We have seen that "world" means the internal extension of the work, the figurative space marked out by curved time. On this level of abstraction, however, the embodiment of the creation is "of a spiritual nature, and, like prayer or love, freely enters the diverse stages of time. It has a predilection for the past, and within that, the tragic, the irreparable, the scandalous and the 'insoluble.' It prays for its dead by incarnating them" (TK 76). The paradox of the *spiritual contact* induces, within incarnation, a strange constellation of abstraction and sensuousness, which makes up a *spectral, ghostly* quality. For the price of such a curving of time is that literature as (parenthetical) 'communication' (TK 77), which thus dresses itself up in the ever expanding genre of the prayer, turns into 'concreté' necromancy

⁵⁷ Angyalosi (1992) 41.

and magic. This blasphemous swing is again the result of a (parenthetical) hyperbole, the striving to establish the connection "beyond the gloomy illusion of memory" (AP 81). *Prayer as metacommunication*: "dialogue with the whole of existence, with each and every, living or dead, human being" (AP 82).

This could then dissolve the widespread misunderstanding, which then serves as a basis for some weak misreadings of the poet's concept of the "tragic," that we are dealing with a static view of the past in Pilinszky's case.⁵⁸ The immobility of the disciples, which is otherwise not necessarily a Christian notion (a translation of the petrifying effect of the Gorgon or the Medusa),⁵⁹ is the figure of the position of the *poetic subject* in the tension of the uncertain, spectral experience that bewitches him (or is interpretatively projected by him). Pilinszky's "Auschwitz" is first and foremost a name for the context in which the mutual interdependence of the sacred and blasphemy ("a scandal, insofar as it *could happen*, and sacred, without exception, insofar as it *did happen*," AP 81) is described in terms of the intertext of the multifaceted biblical *corpus*-interpretation of their connectedness (cf. "Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness," *ICor* 1,23). An incessant reading of this text is severely ambivalent. On the one hand, it is compulsively attractive: "The dead no longer need anyone alive, and still they are calling us, one after the other, more obstinately than anyone else" (AP 81). The equivalent, in his poem "Frankfurt," of this attraction is the terrible eroticism of hunger ("but not even has their pleasure come yet").⁶⁰ On the other hand, it is repulsive, because the incarnation of corpses makes a home for death, the absolute *unheimlich* among the living.⁶¹ The complete surrendering of the self, "*passive creation*" is dangerous. The horror of this ambivalence already appears in the early poems "A francia fogoly" ('The French Prisoner') and "Frankfurt," as well as in another poem entitled "Fokról-fokra" ('Step by Step,' 'Gradually'), whose inverse

⁵⁸ Kulcsár Szabó's interpretation, which reduced these connections to "the tragic quality of irrevocable experience," was bound to fall into the superficiality of identifying in these cases a "need to resolve" this tragic quality and even "some kind of an internal *pietas*" (Kulcsár Szabó 76).

⁵⁹ "And like one who looked into the Gorgon's face, Pilinszky seems to have been petrified by the sight, and has not been able to take his eyes off it: this is what the ever growing line of KZ-writings indicates." (Maróti [1965] 301.)

⁶⁰ Csokits and Hughes's translation ("but before their joy could be consummated") fails to convey both the blunt sexuality and the redundancy, or tautology of the original line. (Usually, it is not pleasure itself that "comes.")

⁶¹ "There are taboos which apply to living Death: we are silent about it, because it is horrible," R. Barthes says in connection with E.A. Poe's short story "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar. (Barthes [1994] 1659. See also sections (9)b- (10), pp. 1662-3.)

seems to be provided in the following excerpt from one of the poet's essays: "Unnamed and unwritten, [...] in the way codified by the gospel, what else could the history of the poor be among us, but this? It is they, the poor, who have, so to speak, incarnated and carried, from time immemorial, directly in their blood and flesh and limbs, their essentially insupportable and gradually annihilating share of the world's burden" (AP 82, my emphasis). In the sensuousness of the incarnated corpse, its spirit, the returning death becomes palpable. The general poetic project of direct sensuousness (meditative concreteness, the first naming, lack of artifice, anti-romanticism, the rejection of any sureness of style) is expressed in Pilinszky's essays within the rhetoric of a defence against literariness, against "mere literature" (E2 119, E2 157), which of course, in turn, produces its own tropes and metaphor(m)s (to borrow Antal Kuklay's coinage). "This purgation of the interpretive mind resembles literary's constant flight from literariness: its wish to dissolve as a medium or, at the very least, to renounce romantic props and to intuit things directly. That truth is found to be stranger than fiction, that to tell things as they are produces a highly mediated art, simply renews the condition which started the protest."⁶² Pilinszky's political resource is the repulsively equivocal taboo of survival; his lot, as Jesus's mother's, is "the pain of survivors, the kind of pain of which human *imagination* is most afraid, and backs away frightened, not daring to approach it" (E2 295, my italics in "*imagination*").

"If death ultimately represents the earlier state of things, then it also represents the earlier state of meaning, of pure anteriority; that is to say, repetition of the literal, or literal meaning. Death is therefore a kind of literal meaning, or from the standpoint of poetry, *literal meaning is a kind of death. Defenses can be said to trope against death, rather in the same sense that tropes can be said to defend against literal meaning.*"⁶³ The unusual liveliness and ghostliness of the conception of love is precisely a consequence of its shifting away from its literal meaning. From a rhetorical point of view, its return is similar to that of the prodigal son: "we also live vertically, and I think we are dead precisely when we can write, only death for me means more of an ecstasy than an annihilation" (B 247), he says, after bringing up the contrary example of what he had said about linear time in his essay "From Cradle to Coffin." This also testifies that the wiry rigidity at the end of

⁶² Hartman IX. Cf. "In the light of the current myth, in which art aims to become a 'total experience,' soliciting total attention, the strategies of impoverishment and reduction indicate the most exalted ambition art could adopt." (Sontag 14.)

⁶³ Bloom (1975) 91.

“Apocrypha” is not (simply) the final consequence of annihilation or “creature-like existence,”⁶⁴ but the starting point of writing, of strong reading. The form of openness is the spectre of death, its nonliteral meaning is writing in its own ecstasy. *Ex-tasis*: moving out, ‘standing outside.’⁶⁵

I am tired. I jut out from the earth.

3

God sees that I stand in the sun.

(transl. Csokits - Hughes)

A compulsory element of the blasphemy of this poetics of death is the *metalepsis* (*transumptio*) that the incarnation which is turning into death becomes, stepping back beyond the “characters of the resolution” (AP 83), into an antecedent of sin, the resource of sin. From this point on, the suffering of the innocent is no more a consequence, but the inevitable source of energy for ruthless events” (AP 83).⁶⁶ Death, conceived of as ecstasy, that is the ecstatic movement which precedes sin and its consequence, which is death as annihilation, is regarded as a resource or power. Rhetorically: literal meaning is the secondary and derivative repetition of figurative meaning. This yields a retrospectively inscribed genesis, where death regarded as ecstasy provides a chance for man to “get outside his own internality as truth, [...] to be transported [...] so that in this ecstasy he could passionately repeat himself as the other.”⁶⁷

To indicate this getting outside, Pilinszky uses the term ‘*exchange of places*,’ interpreted on the basis of the gospel. “Appearances and reality exchanged places” (AP 83). The deadly logic of the forbidden meal is replaced by the ecstatic hunger. “We have seen the satiated man eat behind his fastidious gestures, and the starving man take in swill as an immaterial substance” (AP 83). Consequently, “positional sacrality” is an event of “perverterdness,” of a turn in which liberation arrives “like the first childhood fall (of man).” This is how the return of *fancy* looks like in the

⁶⁴ Kulcsár Szabó 76.

⁶⁵ Cf. Schein (1995) 89.

⁶⁶ Cf. Weil 130, 132, 142.

⁶⁷ Bacsó 90-91.

fantasy of homecoming, since the elements of childhood and the fall are to be found in it just as in our analysis above.

God mostly appears in this deformation as viewer or seer, as, for instance, at the end of "Apocrypha." This, rather than indicating passivity, however, represents God in that manifestation of his power, that he alone can endure the sight of his solipsistic human self ('body') shifted off himself, deprived of his ego, the sight of naked poverty. But in the figurative sense of the sentence, often taken out of its context, "From time to time God, ousted from behind facts, bleeds though the texture of history" (AP 83; cf. N 22), this "*man*" is the metonymy of God, based on bodily selection (bleeding), and this is why the volatility of this trace "not so much peratins to poetry as it obliges *the poet himself*" (AP 83; my emphasis) to meet the challenge of silence. Pilinszky's aesthetics of silence is then, first and foremost, *self-stylisation*, which fits in well with the volatility of the temporal "texture," while also ensuring the rescue of the right of the poet to be heard. Thus two narratives are here intertwined: one is about the figurative division of "God," the other about poetic origin, where the categorical imperative of leaving traces, or writing,⁶⁸ is justified by the ousting of God from behind facts, i.e. from reality.⁶⁹ A *poetic exile*, since it is based on a trope in which God's *kenosis*, his self-emptying, self-ousting incarnation is identified with the prodigal s/Son's voluntary exile, which is its inverse. In this scheme, return (conversion) is a redundant - even sinful - element; we can find the source of this realisation in Kafka's short meditations on the road back to Paradise as well as in Attila József,⁷⁰ while its sharp logic can be illustrated by this passage: "And long millennia had to pass in order that Jesus would again say the sentence *for which* man once *left* the original purity of his heart behind. 'Be ye perfect, as is your Heavenly Father.'" (N 151; my emphases).

⁶⁸ Cf. It is God, and God only, who *writes: on the texture of events* or on paper" (TK 78, my italics). The metaphor of texture has a more concrete *textual* application: Veronica's veil (N 138, 152), without which it would hardly be possible to adequately reveal the poetic proceeds of the Van Gogh-interpretations which transcribe the parable (cf. "Szeretet, igazság, igazságosság" E2 332).

⁶⁹ This sentence is Pilinszky's radical transcription of his favourite passage from Rilke, which he quotes frequently, in various versions, and which is a complaint about facts hiding reality. (Cf. E1 187, E2 120, E2 138, E2 229, E2 282, E2 335, B 231.)

⁷⁰ "Redemption happens in sin itself, ... The parable of the prodigal son reversed" (Beney 94, 99). Maróti's review of Pilinszky, with its pair of parentheses, and Pilinszky's journal entry quoted below were both written in 1964: "(... the Church cries out in the liturgy on Easter eve: 'Oh felix culpa ...' - o, happy sin! ... Because even sin is happy: for it gave an occasion to God to have mercy on human kind)" (Maróti [1965] 286) - "Blessed sin, blessed destruction! ... The prodigal son returns to the bosom of the father. ... There is only the Father" (N 58).

3 CORPUS

Man can put anything into God's mouth that he wants.

*Sartre: Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*⁷¹

the heresy of paraphrase

*Cleanth Brooks and W K Wimsatt*⁷²

The technical term Pilinszky uses for reading as misreading is *paraphrase* ('saying again/wrongly'). In 1968, two years before writing down the enigmatic thesis quoted at the beginning of this essay, Pilinszky phrased the principle of paraphrase as follows: "As my use of words will readily betray, art is of a fundamentally religious origin for me, and this is perhaps why I feel all expressly religious works - including masterworks - to be, in a sense, paraphrases"(TK 756). The parentetical sentences that follow and revise this statement render, first of all, the qualification "expressly religious" redundant. "(More specifically: if all art is rooted in religion, religious art does not really exist, least of all religious literature, in the proximity of sacred texts.)" "In some sense," then, all - but first of all literary - works are paraphrases of sacred texts. Therefore the attribute "religious" does not so much refer to the content, as the language, the "use of words" in this argumentation. Thus we can set up the following slightly lame syllogism: all ("expressly religious") works are paraphrases - all works are religious - all works are paraphrases, *but ultimately, religious works do not exist*. Through the use of words provided ready-made by the Church, Pilinszky breaks his way towards the paradoxical realisation that it is exactly the existence, proximity, assimilating superior force that cancels or brackets the "religious" nature of art, and first of all, literature. In other words, this is not saying that profane literature would be standing beside sacred texts as a battle line ready to attack; it is much rather arguing that *the sanctity of the text, which is always already literature, empties, profanes and disperses itself, and it has the power to do so because it carries within itself this ability in the force of blasphemy and the frame of iterability, and it can only be holy insofar as it is blasphemous, as it includes the forms of being threatened by the creatures of the supreme order of being,*

⁷¹ Sartre (1975) 322 (Act 2, Scene 4).

⁷² Quoted by Kernan 6.

from blasphemy and atheism to the finest textual workings. Theology (Claude Geffré's) concerning itself with secularisation, which appears to be a historical parallel, points out that it is precisely through the *incarnation* of God in Christ that the opposition of the categories of holy and profane have to be given up: "I myself do not believe that secularisation is itself a literary process. The scandal is the stubborn resistance of imaginative literature to the categories of sacred and secular."⁷³

With the slackening of the ideological pressure, the consequence of the deconstructive turbulence of writing (of the Scripture) becomes ever more apparent, which was so closely approximated earlier by mystic experience: "heresy derives from the letter of the Scripture. ('Therefore nothing is more contrary to the sense of the Scripture and is less the Word of God than the Scripture itself, as we would understand it according to its dead letter,')." ⁷⁴ This code of Pilinszky's poetry is provided by his poem "Paraphrase" at the front of his classic volume *Harmadnapon* ('On the Third Day') (1946-58). This poem is an erotic paraphrase of the parable of the prodigal son and the story of the last supper, and Pilinszky also gives a prose transcription of it in a late essay from 1977: "Before you die, you deal yourself out as food, the bloodily precise *image and counterimage* of which is the living world that hierarchically devours each other, and the highest expression of love is when we would like to consume and devour the other" (E2 294, my emphasis).

In connection with the decisive role of the title in the textual process of paraphrase, let us now consider the poem entitled "Költemény" ('Poem'):

Earth is no earth.
Number is no number.
Letter is no letter.
Sentence is no sentence.

God is God.
Flower is flower.
Tumour is tumour.
Winter is winter.

⁷³ Bloom (1989) 4 ("The Hebrew Bible").

⁷⁴ Lukács (1992) 148.

Concentration camp is an encircled
territory of uncertain shape.⁷⁵

In his excellent analysis, Angyalosi Gergely does not, of course, fail to point out the last sentence, which firmly steps out of the tautologies of the title and the structure. After demonstrating that the closure is linked, in its connotations, to the previous two lines as well as, through its soullessly bureaucratic style, to the lethal irony with which the poem destroys language, Angyalosi leaves the problem of the concentration camp open, saying that a hurried answer could easily lead to a common place, whereas an elaboration would have to go into a “dissection of the relationship between *Weltanschauung* and the poetic view of the world.”⁷⁶

My opinion is that “Poem,” which is generally thought to be based on the experience of the forceful collection of the Jewry of the Diaspora by the Nazis, can be fruitfully contrasted to an intertextual relationship with a section of Lajos Maróti’s novel *A kolostor* (‘The Monastery’),⁷⁷ which is set in the period of the dispersion of Hungarian religious orders (cf. “Earth is no earth/Land is no land”), when Christian communities that had gathered together for a sacred purpose were crushed by the Communist rule. In the first scene that concerns us here, a monk with a bad speech defect of uvular r’s and a nostalgia for the Nazis, has the novices pack up his books (cf. “Letter is no letter. [...] Sentence is no sentence.”) he would like to rescue. The novices then solace themselves by evoking the humour of a friend of theirs who had just left, and recall his most “classic” joke, in which

lunatics are telling jokes, but they know all of them so well that they only call the numbers, and that’s enough to make them laugh.
“We were laughing for weeks, too,” says Gergely merrily. “Seventy-six. This was the joke that the lunatics hadn’t known, remember? For weeks we only had to say “seventy-six,” and we all laughed ourselves sick.”

Pilinszky’s poem only retains the mere outlines of the mad logic of this meta-joke which substitutes numbers for the jokes that do not get told: “Number is no number. [...] Sentence is no sentence.” The two novices of the novel, Béda and Gergely, also immediately realise that the joke is a dark parody of their situation in the monas-

⁷⁵ [Translator’s note: again, this is a rough transcription only.]

⁷⁶ Angyalosi (1981) 863.

⁷⁷ Maróti (1979) 288-296.

tery. Their conversation turns serious: what becomes of them if they, too, are carried off and interned by the Communist dictatorship?

‘Listen, Béda, what do you think an internment camp is like?’

Béda stops, too, and ponders.

‘Haven’t the faintest. I guess it should be encircled with barbed wire.’

‘And?’

[...]

‘An internment camp is a territory encircled with barbed wire, where several hundred or possibly thousand people live together. Well, living together is something we have great practice in.’

The question and the guesswork (ellipted here) preceding the definitive answer is, then, omitted by Pilinszky (decontextualisation), and he thickens the ironical self-reflexions into tautologies.⁷⁸

In Maróti’s novel, Béda fulfils the function of answering the question about internment camps. His most concise achievement, the definition, is, however, but a parody of the formality of all definitions, whose indeterminacy only shows a slight difference from the emptiness of Pilinszky’s closing lines, as it is only one definable, formal feature of the camp, namely its delimitability that becomes more and more indelimitable. While the definitions in “Poem” and “The Monastery” can be seen as each other’s paraphrases, the method and subject of definition becomes increasingly inseparable: a “camp” can only be described with its uncertain *periphery* (*periphrase*).⁷⁹ Thus *the tautology of the duplication of “peri” (‘around’) becomes the structure.*

The difference in the vacuity of the definitions is matched, at the same time, by an increasingly strong difference or *demotion*. The guesses of Maróti’s novices about the world of pure profanity are made tentative by their cloistered, and in this respect, sacred, viewpoint at the moment when the mingling of sacred and secular becomes inevitable; this is expressed by the chain of metaphors linking monastery, lunatic asylum and internment camp. The viewpoints, situated hierarchically on a vertical axis represented by the monastery hill, still (or already) defy separation

⁷⁸ The irony of this is amplified by the fact that it is precisely this order, that of the Benedictines of Pannonhalma, that does *not* suffer persecution, and this soon becomes a source of tension, as well as a delaying factor that aggravates the problematics of *homecoming*.

⁷⁹ Pilinszky deals with the (con)fusion of definition and circumscription elsewhere as well (cf. E2 332).

even more in "Poem." "God gets *on the same level* with the most simple and most realistic things in an everyday sense, he comes under one qualification with everything else,"⁸⁰ which means that the text written through decontextualisation is partially provided by a process of *desacralisation*, whose goal cannot even be the profane any more.

"God is God:" as a parallel to the "image" of God closing himself in the tautological self-identity of the mere name, Angyalosi mentions the final lines of Pilinszky's poem "Revelations VIII. 7." ("Jelenések VIII. 7."): "but God sees there is no way/ or road or hope to break from this vision!" (transl. Csokits-Hughes). The title of this poem is shaped by an indirect tautology, since *the (title of) the poem (verse) is simply a (biblical) verse*. This visual loneliness of God is defined, in his poem "Meghatározás" ('Definition'), as the bestially desired mixture of narcissism and clear sight:

What is it to be a worm?
To desire a glance,
one of those long, open encounters,
with which only God looks at himself. [...]

This image of God, rooted in the mystic tradition, is an introduction of the blasphemous sacredness evolved in desacralisation, of the instinctive desire to become God, the peak of which is looking. "*An epistemological argument in support of man's turning into god: [...] 'Nobody knows God, outside God' [...] 'You alone know yourself, Greatest Spirit.'*"⁸¹

Besides and despite the complexity of the poetic (mis)reading of the Bible, we repeatedly encounter the unarticulated notion of *silence*, which has so far been uncritically mystified in most critical works on Pilinszky. Silence seems to constitute, ultimately, the essence of the created world, nature and the gospel (i.e. God's message), and hence, of art and life, the signified of all signs, so that it could become, declared or slyly undeclared, God's signifier. Let us now quote two texts which can, if read hurriedly and without due attention, only add to the commonplace mystique

⁸⁰ Angyalosi (1981) 861.

⁸¹ Lukács (1992) 148.

of silence: "Silent Theatre: that which speaks the common language of silence, the words of God's silence, the universal language of great poetry that returns to God's silence." (E2 192) "But there is silence dwelling at the bottom of all speech. God's silence, which surpasses all speech, that most supreme and unutterable speech which forever wants to be incarnated, in a way similar to how God assumed a human body among us" (E2 119). I believe the system of references linking God's telling silence, the incarnation and the evocation of the famous prologue of the gospel according to John provides an opportunity for consequences that might be fertile from the points of view of both poetics and literary history.

I want, first of all, to evoke Susan Sontag, who says that silence inevitably becomes a trope in a work of art that uses language, since - how could we take it "literally"? Armed with Adorno's quasi-historical analysis,⁸² interpretative attempts to materialise or understand silence are determined to take advantage of silence as the camouflage or else the showing off of the distrust of language. By referring back to the dialectics trying to preserve the denied language, Sontag indicates that this language does not weaken, on the contrary, it becomes more reflexive and sensitive to sensuousness, of which it becomes the substitute, and to the elements of seeing (contemplation, attention, blindness, reading, or a similarity to films, photographs or icons etc) or carnality - to emphasise only those elements of the treasury of the "aesthetics of silence," which are also indispensable in Pilinszky's "aesthetics of the gospel." The internal boundaries of perception or "*aisthesis*" induced in Pilinszky a desire for the transformation or "schooling" of the attention towards questions (of boundaries). What, then, are the questions that Pilinszky's silence raises? His penname could have been "Johannes de Silentio (John of the Silence - the evangelist of God's silence?)."⁸³

First of all, the question of the iterability of the silence of the gospel, of the "word made flesh." "What is truth?" Pilate asked. And Jesus was silent. And why?" (E2 331). Here we have to make the preliminary remark that this question of Pilate's is only to be found in *John's* gospel, the gospel of the "*word made flesh*," whose beginning is the well-known assertion of the priority of the word to the body. This priority does not remain an abstract speculation, but is embodied, in accor-

⁸² "he who wants to be silent 'at once,' is forced to stutter, and use, reflex-like, half-baked categories" (Lukács [1975] 543).

⁸³ Balassa (1995) 94. In 1986, Balassa devoted a full essay to Johannes de Silentio, penname of Kierkegaard when writing his *Frygt og Bæven* ("Utószó Ábrahám hallgatásához," in Balassa (1995) 63-89).

dance with the curious dramaturgy of chapter one, in the figure of St *John* the Baptist, who is nothing but a crying *voice/word* (*John* 1, 23),⁸⁴ one that prepares the way for the incarnate Word that comes after him. This is interesting here because the structure of priority advocated by the “Johns” was so important for *János* (‘John’) Pilinszky, that he extended it to cover the whole of the Bible, as shown by one of his notes to the *Genesis*: “This *preliminary incarnation of the Word in words* will forever remain a true image of every search for God”(E2 49, my emphasis). When drawing, on the basis of the aesthetics of the gospel, my conclusions from Jesus’s silence before Pilate, I will therefore keep John’s gospel in the foreground.⁸⁵

What is the truth then in the matter of the silence? Pilinszky’s approach is dual. On the one hand: “We answer Pilate every day. Jesus was silent for us as well.” (E2 332). This substitute silence is an interruption and parody of a communication predicated on obtaining and possessing truth. In this it can also be regarded as the critique of the question asked, or as, so to speak, a piece of Jesus’s gallows humour. Moreover, the argument allows us to conclude that Jesus is also *silent for the readings of the gospel which condemn Pilate*. I think this very powerful insight lead Pilinszky to call Pilate, at worst, simply a “petty bourgeois” or an “ordinary man” (N 180), or at another place a “superficial and bad psychologist” (E1 265). The irony of the silence that Jesus gave in lieu of an answer is not an isolated poetic quality in the scene, since Pilate’s situation, the incommensurability of verdict and responsibility is already ironic, which leads to a separation of gesture and word. “His gesture: he washed his hands. His word: *Ecce homo*. Behold the man. - And he points at Jesus.” He points at him *with clean hands* - this is a singularly synoptic version, since the washing of hands is not mentioned by John, but only by Matthew (possibly in order to bring out a parallel between Judas and Pilate). “And still, perhaps nobody else fished so many souls for Jesus as Pilate through this mistake,” while he is merely trying to delay, again and again, the moment when his public and personal responsibilities suffer a split. Pilate’s mistake with which he draws the condemnation of posterity upon himself is the hesitation of passing a sentence,

⁸⁴ [Translator’s note: “*vox clamantis in deserto*” in the *Vulgate*; “voice of one crying in the wilderness” in *The Authorised Version*.]

⁸⁵ According to Schein, it is true of Pilinszky’s early period already that his “conception came closer and closer to the long interpretative line of those words of *John’s Gospel* which provide Dostoevski’s motto to *The Brothers Karamazov*: ‘Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit’ (12, 24).” (Schein (1994) 34.)

which might simply be a consequence of his trying to take his ironic situation seriously.

When considering Pilate's utterances in the context of his dialogue with Jesus, the question of "What is truth?" can hardly be reduced to the utterance of an incorrigible rationalist or Sophist, a chatting executioner, a civil servant suffering of a role crisis, or an ur-Hamlet. Though witty and attractive, Kermode's interpretation does not fit the ironic conception outlined here: "Pilate is now a thoughtful, philosophical figure; it was Bacon, in a later midrash, who said he was jesting, and did not stay for an answer."⁸⁶ No, "this question can only be answered with another question" (E1 26). For Pilate's first question is that of the accusation, whether he is the king of the Jews, and Jesus's enigmatic reply, "Thou sayest it," is followed, in Matthew and Mark, by dead silence, which only loses some of its weight in Luke's version because of the discussion of the Herod plot. In John, Pilate has to ask twice, because the two of them get entangled in a virtual duel of questions and answers: Jesus answers question to question, and so does Pilate. "I can see you have taken my advice and write in questions rather than statements," Pilinszky makes Dostoevsky's Stavrogin say in a fictitious letter (N 211). What follows from this is, at this point, only the rather dubious answer: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (*John* 18,36). Jesus's curt answer to Pilate's repeated question prompts a surprisingly new discourse: "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (*John* 18, 37). Since here Jesus refers his kingdom not to the slightly fantastic non-of-this-world host, but to the truth, Pilate's famous question appears to be the natural response of an attentive listener. Why does he not get an answer? According to the evangelist, this is because Pilate went back to the accusers immediately after this; according to Pilinszky, because Jesus remained silent. *Pilinszky, then, reads the element of silence into John from the synopticals, with whom silence is the reply to the previous question, "Art thou the king of the Jews?"* I think Pilate did not wait for Jesus's answer because on hearing his own question, he immediately replied to himself that the truth - for him, about the legal process, of course - is that Jesus is innocent, as proved by what he had just said, - or at least he was not guilty just because he makes hardly decipherable statements -, therefore he

⁸⁶ Kermode 96.

rushed out to assert his opinion before the accusers. Although Jesus does remain silent in answer to the question Pilate asks on his return, this is an answer to a third question: "Whence art thou?" (*John* 19, 9). For while he was outside, Pilate heard that the accused made himself the Son of God. His new question about Jesus's provenance indicates that on hearing the new accusation, Pilate got a lot closer to a unified interpretation of Jesus's utterances, and so he could ask a much more specific question to clear up the missing link. He could then reconstruct that the not-of-this-worldness refers to divine origin, that his (perhaps divine) mission had been, from his birth, to bear testimony to the truth, which could be heard by those who were of the truth. Consequently, Jesus cannot be one of those *of* the truth, so the question is logical and precise: *where else is Jesus from, that he can bear testimony to the truth to those who are of the truth, and from what basis does he derive his testimony and existence? John's Jesus offers silence in answer to a question about not "the truth," but the credibility and nature of the testimony about it.* And this is because Jesus should have talked about the Father, but since the evening of the last supper, "an enormous shadow had fallen on Jesus's divine nature. The Father, too, seemed to be silent, and turn away from him" (E1 264). But owing to the composition of the gospel story, Pilate, who is indubitably "moved by the mysterious power of his prisoner, and even discusses religion and ethics with him,"⁸⁷ cannot hear what and why Jesus keeps secret, since he cannot know the parable of the prodigal son in *Luke*, or Jesus's important farewell speech from the previous night given in *John* 14-17. He who, according to our analysis, gives such a meticulous attention to Jesus's words, can hardly be blamed for not asking *who* the truth was.⁸⁸ It is with an obstinacy stronger than sarcasm that John's Pilate continues to claim, and *has it written in the cross in three languages*, as an affirmative answer to his first (and synoptic) question, that Jesus is the king of the Jews. "Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written" (*John* 19, 21-2).

The other half of Pilinszky's answer to Jesus's silence is as follows: "Because he himself is the truth. I am (the way,) the truth (, and the life)" (E2 331). Silence in this sense is an absolute answer, a solution to a puzzle similar to that of Poe's "The Purloined Letter:" what we are seeking is right there in front of us; Jesus offers

⁸⁷Kermode 97.

⁸⁸Balassa (1987) 140.

himself, his silent “body,” his sheer presence as an answer. In which the rub is that it is *not* a nonverbal reply, since Pilinszky interprets his argument through one of Jesus’s fundamental statements, which is in turn unknown to Pilate, which means that he uses and fills, in his own way, a narrative gap. *Jesus’s, or Pilinszky’s silence can, then, be derived not only from the synoptic misreading of the three-plus-one gospels, but from the metaphoric rearrangement of the plot of the “plus one,”* St John. The function of Pilate’s figure is, therefore, to break John’s scheme of *the word before the body*, whose unfeasibility is manifested precisely in him, a much more perceptive listener of Jesus’s words.

But the fact that Jesus (his body, his silence) is truth itself, has a significant retroactive effect on his Son-ness, on the family saga of the divine persons. Pilinszky’s words are rather hesitant on the subject of God *and/or* Father and Son. God alone knows the truth, or more precisely, he himself is the truth (from this we can again syllogistically conclude that *nobody knows God except for God*). The notion of “truth” retains here a prevaillingly legal, juridical sense: “all jurisdiction is a dethronement of the living God, of the Father. He who judges, [...] identifies himself with truth, making the Father redundant, and substitutes himself for the person of the living God” (E2 331-2).⁸⁹ It is therefore only instead of man, who usurps truth, but also by substituting himself for the person of the Father, and thus, ultimately, by making him redundant, that the Son retains silence in his incarnate capacity. This constellation of figures displays several similarities to the parable of the prodigal son, and precisely in that unreadable, or only misreadable (paraphrase-generating) texture, which is constituted by the aenigma of the Godhead and the metaphor of the body.

Let us now juxtapose the parable from *Luke*, and the triple metaphor from *John* (*John* 14, 6), which Pilinszky studded with parentheses in order to enhance the intactness of the argument, and the emphasis on the middle metaphor (*thruth*), and the clarity of the reference. The broader context of this is provided by Chapter 14, where Jesus launches into his long farewell speech. The story of the master and his disciples will soon come to a conclusion, a story which started with the two disciples of John the Baptist asking Jesus where he lived. “He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it

⁸⁹ This is equivocal in the gospel already: “Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man. And yet if I judge, my judgement is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me” (*John* 8,15-6). Weil, however, offers a reading in John’s vein for a synoptic passage (*Matthew* 7, 1; *Luke* 6, 37): “Not even Jesus judges. He himself is the judgement” (Weil 132).

was about the tenth hour" (*John* 1,39). John seems to have devoted Chapter 14 to the task of dissolving the obscurity surrounding this sentence and the primary point of the meeting of the disciples and Jesus, i.e. Jesus's dwelling place. The farewell instruction, as we know, claims that Jesus goes forth and prepares a place in his Father's house for those who are his own, and will return to take them with him so that they could be together. This is the point at which Thomas, Jesus's greatest interrogator besides Pilate, interrupts: "Thomas said unto him, Lord, we know not whiter thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (*John* 14, 5-6). Frye has the following comment on this passage:

Jesus' answer "I am the way," explodes, or, perhaps, deconstructs, the whole metaphor of journey, of the effort to go there in order to arrive here. The metaphor of a journey modulates into a metaphor of an erect human body, with a head on top and feet underneath, with which we identify ourselves. Philip asks to be shown the father, and gets the same type of answer: there is nothing there; everything you need is here. *In the synoptics* Jesus makes the same point in telling the disciples that the kingdom of heaven, the core of his teaching, is among them or within them. Nothing Jesus says seems to have been more difficult for his followers to grasp than his principle of the here-ness of here. [...] *Once we form part of a body which is both ourselves and infinitely larger than ourselves, the distinction between movement and rest vanishes: there is no need for a way when the conception "away" is no longer functional.*

I am not connecting Jesus' metaphor here with a structure of belief, but with the response of a reader to a verbal structure. Following a narrative is a metaphorical journey,⁹⁰ and the journey is metaphorically horizontal, going from here to there.

As we have seen, the framework of Jesus's life also displays the scheme of "word first, body second," which spreads from the prehistoric silence of the word which is to become incarnate ("with God," *John* 1,1) to the taciturnity of the incarnate word (before Pilate). These two points frame the time spent with the disciples. Still, we here witness how Jesus suspends John's scheme himself, in that he answers the ultimately synonymous questions of the two disciples, then Thomas and Philip, and finally Pilate, differently, but still in the same way, i.e. by demonstration. In

⁹⁰ Frye 94-5, my italics.

the first case we are simply told about this happening, while in the other two, Jesus - through words or silence - points at himself, at his own body. A very similar case is *life*, the last word of the self-declaration, which, through John's metaphors of the eucharist and light, also refers to Jesus himself, (6, 47-58; 7, 37-8; 8, 12 etc), and which is also in a strong connotative relation with *way*.

Jesus's triple self-declaration is then partly an incarnate, or *corporal*, reading of God's tautological declaration of himself in the Old Testament, and partly a methodological extension of his body, or *corpus*, which also serves as a deconstruction of the circle of the homecoming and the circularity of the interpretation: "The absolute solution to the hermeneutic circle is the transformation by the incarnate *Logos*, when we no longer explain something, but we ourselves become the living explanation, the *logos*."⁹¹

A classic restatement of this transfiguration is provided by Kierkegaard, who maintains that "if we do not become that which we understand, then we do not understand it."⁹² If, however, we cannot interpret this identification of the textual level, then the potential anti-literariness of this mystic thesis⁹³ dooms the clarification of our question about repetition to failure. Taking advantage of Deleuze's view, we can therefore say that the ability of understanding to become its own subject matter is carried by *writing*,⁹⁴ in that, as Sartre says in his interpretation of Kierkegaard, the poet is "different from *everybody else*, from himself, from that which he writes down." This, Pilinszky writes, is because in literature we do not even know "our own selves, only the writing that issues from under our pen" (N 49).⁹⁵ Sartre measures the possibility of interpreting Kierkegaard in the proportion of a reading's ability to become a sign repeating the *corpus in its own taciturnity*:

If we insert its *words* into our language, translating them *with our own words*, will knowledge find its limits, and by some kind of a paradoxical inversion of meaning, will it indicate that which signifies as its own taci-

⁹¹ Kardos Daróczy 212.

⁹² Quoted in Kardos Daróczy 212.

⁹³ Their [the mystics'] central axiom is normally something like '*One becomes what one beholds*,' that is, consistent and disciplined vision ends in the kind of identification we have been associating with existential metaphor. Such people normally show *little interest in literature*, though there are literary affinities in some religions [...]" (Frye 86, my emphases).

⁹⁴ Deleuze 11-17.

⁹⁵ Sartre (1976) 317.

turn foundation? [...] We have to question *that which remains* of Kierkegaard, his word-corpse. [...] We asked: what hinders the late Kierkegaard from becoming the subject matter of cognition? [...] his answer is [...]: the progress of that which is signified back to that which signifies cannot be the subject matter of any kind of mental cognition. [...] His first answer is that man understands that which he becomes.⁹⁶

Pilinszky, who was equally influenced by the writing of the Kierkegaard of *The Repetition*⁹⁷ and the writing of the Sartre of *La nausée*, does the same in his blasphemous and alarming attempt to become the body of the prodigal son or the Son, and repeat their “word-corpses.” Jesus’s figure, his body, text and the book, the verbal body gathered around him by the belief in him, could not, however, become a *corpus* without being repeated in a stigmatised state, that is without being seen after its resurrection. At this point John’s gospel summons up Thomas again, who ties the testimony of Jesus’s resurrection or the return of the former Jesus, to the sensuous experience of the stigmata. Jesus, however, only permits this after his visit to his Father (*John* 20, 17). Thomas’s figure, called ‘*doubting*’ in the tradition, but *Didymos*, or ‘double’ by John, “is like the *stigma* of every mark, already split.”⁹⁸ The stigma of repeatability on the corpus of the text.

From this point on, whenever, scattered in space, the writing of the *corpus* becomes a real Book (incarnation), it gives a new stillborn life to itself amidst the dispersion of its divinity (*kenosis*). This renders Frye’s statement that “the word, which points toward a spiritual understanding of itself, can be succeeded only by the spiritual form of itself”⁹⁹ particularly pertinent to the gospel according to St John, which inscribes the hermeneutics of testimony in the poetics of the possibility of writing on.¹⁰⁰ This, in Pilinszky’s reading, could sound like this: the Word, which points towards a spiritual reading of itself (its “body”), can only be

⁹⁶ Sartre (1976) 288, 299, 318-9.

⁹⁷ “If someone asked me how Kierkegaard wrote, there’d be no doubt: in well-linked, tall letters with a tilt forward. This is certain, although I’ve never seen his handwriting” (E2 302). In my non-expert opinion, this describes Pilinszky’s hand just as fittingly as Kierkegaard’s.

⁹⁸ Derrida (1977b) 185.

⁹⁹ Frye 258.

¹⁰⁰ “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (16, 12). “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book” (20, 30). “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world could not contain the books that should be written” (21, 25).

surpassed by its spectral form - where surpassing refers to the series of vestigially traceable steps between the dead body and the body after death.

Thus, in answer to Zsuzsa Beney's parenthetical question, "(It is worth mentioning and it would be interesting to investigate why Pilinszky invokes several of his favourite authors in his poems - Dostoevsky, Van Gogh, Emily Brontë, Mozart etc. What sort of a *personal relationship* could be evoked and? or? be *substituted for the resurrection* and the secret turn towards the dead?"),¹⁰¹ we can briefly propose that the poet's relationship to his precursors is likely to be closely connected to that relationship of narrative misreading which takes place between Pilinszky's "imagination" and Jesus's words, Jesus as corpus, i.e. text, and the dead of the "texture of history."¹⁰² Jesus was more abandoned than the dead of Auschwitz. But his poetic imagery makes a more faded impression.

At the same time, the liturgy of the dead is also waiting to be created.

"This cannot be the fruit of beautification or a simple borrowing of imagery" (N 138; my italics). Among the working papers to the "KZ-oratórium" ('Concentration Camp Oratorio') we do have extant the sketch of such a liturgy of the death which follows the structure of the mass and contains the telling reference: "Ending (John's gospel)" (N 20-22).

When Pilinszky asks his direct question about the identity of Christ, echoing the Pilate of John's gospel, then he simultaneously links this to repeatability. "Who are you? - whom we can follow without the danger of the slightest shadow of being epigones falling on us?" (E2 294). If we add his statement "He [Homer] is one of my most beloved authors. And Jesus. He would be even if I wasn't a believer" (B 229), and another question, "But when will our use of words coincide with Jesus's?," then this reveals the poles of the paradox as the ambivalence of an anxiety of Jesus's influence, insofar as repetition, which is the constitutive imperative of the "aesthetics of the gospel," carries the menace of the haunting sceptre of epigonism. And indeed, one of the highest peaks of

¹⁰¹ Beney 97, my italics. Following the trace of this parenthesis, Schein concludes that Pilinszky's view of reality is "best revealed in the ways he relates to some definitive figures of modern art (Dostoevsky, Van Gogh, Kafka, Simone Weil, Attila József, Beckett, Wilson etc.)" (Schein [1995] 90). Cf. Ted Hughes's statement: "It is characteristic that his affinities are not with other poets, but with such figures as Van Gogh, certain of Dostoevsky's characters and above all, perhaps, with Simone Weil" (Hughes 12).

¹⁰² According to Balassa, Pilinszky "*experiences, narrates and interprets scandal, too, as the passion of the Son, whereas this would be the passion story of the adherents of a religion of the Father*" (Balassa (1995) 97, my emphasis).

Pilinszky's powers is his reading of Jesus's silence before Pilate, in which he performs a revision of his own rhetorics of silence which only reports of the fatally superior force of the returning dead man. Which of course brings repeated crisis to the weakness and one-sidedness of the interpretations which regard the rhetoric and poetic dynamism of the averting of anxiety as a mere springboard to an uninhibited and unbounded spiritualisation. Often enough, it is precisely the most seminal texts that serve as bases for this, for instance the tropes of the uninterpretability of the gospel, which are so easily regarded as gestures of a mystic respect and practice (mystery: 'closing the eyes'). "Great truths are uncircumscribable, incalculable, and only warm us in the humility of contemplation. [...] let us close our eyes and cry [...] The gospels were written for eyes that are wide open with happiness, closed with weeping and stuck together with agony" (E2 289).

However, reading on this passage, keeping in mind our previous interpretation of weeping and Pilinszky's "Letter" to the gospel, we come across a new defensive method. This is the deprivation of the Scripture, i.e. the Writing, from being writing. "Jesus only wrote in the dust and on the face of the water. Why is that? Because dust and water will timelessly preserve that which makes paper tire and moulder away. [...] Because the decipherable letter is of man. And the indecipherable message is solely of Him, who wrote in the dust and died in agony for us between the two thieves" (E2 289). Shortly afterwards, Pilinszky wrote, with the title "Én Jézusom" ('Jesus Mine') and in the second person, "what then are you like? According to the testimony of the gospels, you never wrote, only once, in the dust. Still, you are the only one who wrote, and it is we who write in the dust" (E2 294). Let us note here that this is not according to the gospels, only to *John* 8, 6-8, where writing on the ground serves to fill in the silence that replaces an answer: the scene where this takes place is a version of the process of the passion, only here it is Jesus who finds himself in Pilate's later situation. Pilinszky's Pilate-like question is answered, this time, by John's overpowering writing, which in turn is answered by the poet's typically notorious "synoptic" misreading of the three *synoptic gospels* and *St John*, and his reclaiming the writing of the Scriptures. "I would like to write a synoptic gospel once, because there are things that I do not understand, and things which are contradictory," he says in a conversation (B 229), and his plans included the writing of what he called a "Book of Jesus" (N 144), as well as a journal in dialogue, entitled "Szinopszis" ('Synopsis'), which would have been a major

work and (in) which (he) would *speak at last* (N 200-201). "Synopsis" would have been co-authored by Bébi, the poet's actual aunt who had a severe speech defect, and about whom he writes, at the same place, "Later - half consciously, half unconsciously - I borrowed my whole poetic creed from her. The heavy joy of having managed, step by step, to name each subsequent object." She is not simply a muse, but also the figure of Pilinszky's *Sublimé*, who unites all tropes that the poet uses for the language of the gospel, as well as the mother tongue's instance that excludes all textual - and thus, by necessity, biblical - antecedents, and whose description contains several poetic allusions that we are now sensitivised to through our previous interpretations:

Should someone ask what after all is my poetic language, in truth I should have to answer: it is some sort of lack of language, a sort of linguistic poverty. I have learned our mother-tongue from my mother's elder sister [whose nickname was Bébi], who met with an accident, was ill, and got barely beyond the stage of childlike stammering. This is not much. No doubt the world has added this and that, completely random, accidentally, from very different workshops. This I *received*. And because the nice thing about our mother-tongue is exactly this fact, that we receive it, we do not want to add anything to it. We would feel it detrimental to do so. It would be as if we tried to improve our origin. But in art even such poor language - and I must say this with ther pride of the poor - can be redeemed. In art the deaf can hear, the blind can see, the cripple can walk, each deficiency may become a creative force of high quality. (B 64-5)¹⁰³

The self-evident statement that these plans remained mere plans is as futile and deceptive as saying that Pilinszky's life work is nothing else but a carrying out of these gospel-based projects. Rather, our analysis seems to support Péter Balassa's finely tuned opinion according to which "*Pilinszky's oeuvre is: an - almost bodyless - corpus, which [...] requires a gospel-like reading.*"¹⁰⁴ *Pilinszky's "aesthetics of the gospel," which is applied to imagination through the repetition, which is to say the somewhat blasphemous strong misreading, of the parable of the prodigal son, can be opened up through a synoptic reading, covering all of the author's corpus or "word-corpse" (Sartre), of the dialectics, endeavours,*

¹⁰³ Translated and cited by Hughes 8.

¹⁰⁴ Balassa (1987) 144.

contradictions, (enforced) silences of an anxiety of the gospel's influence and a desire towards it. I am aware of the contestability of an approach that regards an *oeuvre* as a territory to be explored in all directions, but interpretations following the temporal order of the evolution of the life work (a strict chronology, the sequence of the publications, poetic periods and development) likewise have their weak points; the balance of the former possibility is here meant to be assisted by a discussion of the narrative nature of a latent poetic construction “in lieu of an *ars poetica*.”

It is Baudelaire who, as a forerunner of Pilinszky, portrays the once masked or hidden, once differing/deferring protagonist of this narrative, the inventor of all tropes, that is “creative imagination” with the help of subsequent *acts* of analysis and synthesis (in Bloom’s terms, limitation and representation),¹⁰⁵ Old and New Testament *allegories* of fertility, and the *example* of soldiers of different ranks. (It is worth paying attention to the parentheses here as well.):

You can easily spot those whom it avoids from a distance, since they carry the corruption of some secret malediction, which makes all their works turn dry, like the fig-tree in the gospel.

It is the analysis and the synthesis. [...] It created, at the beginning of our existence, analogy and metaphor. It decomposed creation into its elements, and created, out of the obedient material thus accumulated, a new world according to new laws, whose motives dwell in the very depth of the soul; it created the feeling of the new. And since the world was created by it (I think we can safely say this also in the religious sense), it has a right to govern it as well. What do you think a warrior would be worth without imagination? He could be an excellent member of the rank and file, but faced with the task of commanding armies, he would not be able to make conquests.¹⁰⁶

When Pilinszky uses similar military metaphors to encode his relationship to Attila József, his most immediate precursor among Hungarian poets, - “He had the profoundest influence on me,” Pilinszky says towards the end of his life (B 222) - the stakes of the contest are not less than the possession of “creative imagination,” which is far superior to the merely combinative fancy, which, like a *bricoleur*, takes apart and puts together, toiling away dreamily, and the division

¹⁰⁵ See his map of misprision: Bloom (1975) 84.

¹⁰⁶ Baudelaire 114.

and capture of poetic power, the *Sublime*, along the lines of the third, intermediary Bloomian act of *Substitution*.

In 1964, influenced by a new publication of Baudelaire's cited writing, Pilinszky comes to the conclusion that imagination can, at the best, only be a re-creation in some relationship with already existing creation, and that the strength, or relative originality, i.e. the meaning of this re-creation can only be guaranteed by the radicality of the destruction of the antecedent, the radicality of a negative creation. "We do not yet clearly see the role of literature. It might serve to pull down the world, and thus prepare the way for a new genesis. ('Heaven and hell shall pass, but my Words ...') "(N 49). This is why "creative imagination" is put between inverted commas in Pilinszky's 1970 lecture on the "lot" of creative imagination, where, according to our analysis, it is already seen as a development - defying vain attempts at its devaluation - of combinative fancy, in the same way as the inventor is a development of the *bricoleur* who just puts things together. "If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*. The engineer, whom Lévi-Strauss opposes to the *bricoleur*, should be the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon. In this sense the engineer is a myth. A subject who supposedly would be the absolute origin of his own discourse and supposedly would construct it "out of nothing," "out of whole cloth," would be the creator of the verb, the verb itself. The notion of the engineer who supposedly breaks with all forms of *bricolage* is therefore a theological idea., and since Lévi-Strauss tells us elsewhere that *bricolage* is mythopoetic, the odds are that the engineer is a myth produced by the *bricoleur*.¹⁰⁷

Pilinszky's "aesthetics of the Gospel" repeats the Bible with a dual and equivocal gesture. On the one hand, it revises the father's creation through the idiosyncratically misread parable of the prodigal son; the narrative thus provided is the allegory of the lot of "creative imagination" - or that of "The Lot of 'Creative Imagination' in our Time." On the other, the (at least linguistic) uninterpretability that is singled out as the essence of the gospel returns as a negative quality experienced through the pangs of contradictory and unintelligible points that urge him towards a new synoptic writing. The economy of Pilinszky's witing is hard to imagine without his probably unconscious inclination to

¹⁰⁷ Derrida (1978) 285, transl. Alan Bass.

discover, “synoptically,” rupture, contradiction, question or, as in the analysis of Christ’s silence, silence where there would perhaps be none without him. The internal in- or perversion of the divided imagination, Bloom’s Substitution, can be caught in the action here: “creative imagination” operates as its own negation, looking for errors and gaps, and is in fact destructive, solely in order to provide sufficient material for the “neogenesis,” fancy’s activity of recombining the rubble. Pilinszky’s revisionary force is capable of taking some edge off the blasphemy of the anxiety that mourns over the tautology of the uncreatability of creation; one could say he finds a pre-text for this in the parable of the prodigal son, or in the pressure, sublimated into an aesthetic imperative, for its repetition. “[T]here is no way / or road or hope to break” (Revelations VIII. 7, transl. Csokits-Hughes), though, from his blasphemic re-vision or misreading that it is precisely the success of destruction that he calls grace in the course of writing, this two-phase operation of imagination. Thus Simone Weil’s sentence, “Imagination is always ready to fill in, immediately, all gaps that grace makes,”¹⁰⁸ which Pilinszky translated in 1964-5, could, in a poetic transcription by the poet, sound something like this: fancy is always ready and is always compelled by necessity, to immediately fill up all gaps made by “misreading-creative” imagination.

I could say little, within the limits of this essay, about my opinion that Pilinszky’s writing probably also strikes *itself* with this ‘grace.’ I would now still venture the statement that its self-revisionary force reaches its peak precisely with the *coup de grace* given to his “aesthetics of the gospel:” in one of his last interviews in 1980, when he only thought of Baudelaire whom he was “constantly reading at a time,” having called Jesus his most beloved author and having mentioned the plan of the synoptic gospel, Pilinszky says this about Jesus, or “him who invented this: the world’s greatest writer,” that “[h]e had no words for the creation of the world”(B 229). To bring out that this might well be Pilinszky’s most serious attempt(ation), conscious or unconscious, to contradict his Jesus and himself, it suffices to recall that Pilinszky quotes Jesus’s parenthetic word(s) followed by the dots of ellipsis: “(‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Words...’)” (N 49, cf. Luke 21, 33), when he tries to illustrate that literature “prepares a neogenesis.” It is only grammatically that Pilinszky’s unselfconscious imagination negates itself, since fancy, which thus had “creative imagination” do

¹⁰⁸ Weil 77 (“L’imagination combleuse”).

the work of destruction for it, does not have to do a lot of combination to come up with the question of *why* it has no word for creation, and the answer, which is provided by the sentence of the “there is no word,” the silence after Pilate’s question: because that word, or sentence, is itself.

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This essay was translated into English by Tekla Mecsnóber.