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The Boundaries of the Stage

Péter Nádas: *Burial*

Burial is perhaps Péter Nádas's most complex play: the difficulties critics face when they want to assign it to stylistic and generic categories, regarding its irony, self-reflexive structure and theme (as it is also a play about the possibilities of theatre), are reflected in their interpretative experiments that often gainsay one another.

This essay is intended to give an overview of Nádas's play based on the points of view that I find the most relevant: its relationship to the dramatic tradition and its own age; the questions it raises about honesty, the construction and the accessibility of the self; the self-reflexive character and structure of the play; the parts that reflect on the nature of the theatre; its connection to myths and rites; and finally, the way these latter are reflected in what the *Burial* tells us about society, the possibilities of communication, and the relationship of power structures and the sexes.

Burial is mostly about itself and the theatre. This essay examines how it reflects itself, and how it throws light upon the techniques and problems of interpretation, response, and assigning meaning.

I. "IF AT LEAST THERE WERE SOME RULES, AND WE HAD TO FOLLOW THEM EXACTLY"

The traditional medium of Nádas's stage is marked out by Jean Genet, Samuel Beckett, János Pilinszky, Ingmar Bergman's film stage, Chekhov's comedy theatre, the 17th century French Christian plays (inasmuch as the conflict of the drama is not in action but in diction, in language – *Burial* is partly about the possibilities of speaking about

something), and archaic rituals.¹ Some critics define its place as one “in the field of Hungarian absurd”²: it is the projection of states of the mind and emotions like fear and anxiety because of the impossibility of human relations. Another definition contradicts this probably oversimplifying point of view, and says that *Burial* “is not naturalist, not symbolist, not surrealist, not absurd, and not comical in the Dantean or Aristotelian sense of the word.”³ This series of negative definitions, if true in itself, seems to be too general. Such statements do not consider the methods by which, and the extent to which, the play still relies on the above mentioned traditions, nor how it at the same time confines its own limits.

Nádas’s play does stand close to the absurd in that it reflects on a crisis – even if it is a crisis that is beyond the absurd. The theatre of the absurd aimed not to get out of the crisis that it conceived as basically human, but to live the crisis in its totality. Although with a paroxysm that is more sedate than that of the absurd, *Burial* also turns against itself many times, but it is beyond being anti-theatrical as well. Another characteristic that refers to the theatre of the absurd is that *Burial* also dissolves dramatic conflict, plot, dialogues and characters. As Beckett’s plays were intended to be the end plays of theatre, *Burial* is also about the end of the theatre, or rather one kind of theatre and way of reception.

Burial’s being beyond the absurd is also revealed in that it questions what the human is: it turns away from depicting the subject not because it has an abhorrence of its manifestations, but because it has to examine what the subject is, and whether it is possible to examine and talk about it in the language of drama. However, Nádas heavily relies on the tradition of the absurd in the way he mixes the tones of speech, the sounds of ironic jest and mystic drama.

In absurd plays, the characters are far removed from the traditional realistic theatre in Europe: they are emphatically aimless, or set aims that are known to be unreachable from the beginning. In absurd plays like in Beckett’s *Godot*, the lack of plot expresses the monotony of time and the repetitions in human matters. This is also more self-conscious in *Burial*: here the actors’ impossible (yet necessary) game-attempts are fitted into this pattern, and another level of monotonous repetitions is their reflection on these attempts.

Burial holds a mirror to itself, speaks about itself: it is a play in which two actors are on the stage, striving with the possibilities of speech and roles, and then,

¹ Péter Balassa, “Opera és komédia” in *A másik színház* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1989) p. 171.

² Erzsébet Ézsaiás, *Mai magyar dráma* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1986) p. 221.

³ L. Mész, *Színház* (Budapest: Korona, 1995) p. 440.

after taking different roles upon themselves, they discuss why it is useless to play, although they do not have any other choice, because discussion is also part of the game. The mirror-game makes the spectators direct their attention to what is beyond what is said: the play in this respect follows the tradition marked out by Chekhov and Pinter. The two characters in the *Burial* talk to each other because if their language is common, their reality can also be common, and a common reality is just what they try to create. Their very first sentences are about defining their position. (ACTRESS: "Are you too in it?" ACTOR: "Are you in it, too?")⁴ They usually adhere to the significance of their common reality and the making of this reality. They suppose this when they talk to one another: this is what gives such a tension to a scene when one of them will not talk. Remaining silent, one disregards their connection, takes the feeling of reality away from the other. (It is especially emphasised by the blindfold scene, when the Actress does not answer the Actor's questions, and the Actor, while seeking and feeling for her, recognises that he is unable to switch off his thoughts, it is impossible not to think of anything for a long time, yet it is this situation in which he questions the existence of his own thinking being most strongly: "I am playing that I am doing this gesture, right now. I am playing that I am telling this sentence, right now. And is it not me if I say, if I do what others have imagined about me? This lie is what I play. And this is also a thought." (pp. 274-75). Language does not refer to the structure of relationship between to persons, but creates this relationship.⁵

This is why it is of such a basic significance for them to clarify their position, to explore the possibilities of speech. This is what makes the Actor long for ease, relief from the burden of the task when he says: "If at least there were some rules, and we had to follow them exactly." And then, while they are talking without paying attention to each other, the Actor draws the conclusion that they are free, while the Actress is talking about her nightmare, a situation in which one has the least liberty: she is standing on the stage or in a classroom and cannot utter a word. They both move away from freedom. The Actor wants boundaries, while the Actress tries to avoid speaking about it by describing her dream. They both find calmness in it, after a more exaltedly despairing part. The Actress reflects on their situation, somewhat resolving the feeling of emptiness which they have got to: "But now I have grown stiff in this." The Actor keeps luring himself: "This is why I've told we are free. And this is, after all, enough.

⁴ Péter Nádas, *Temetés* in Péter Nádas, *Színház* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1982), pp. 200-201. References to this edition of the play will be henceforth indicated in the text. The translations of quotations from Hungarian texts are mine throughout.

⁵ Quigley, *The Pinter Problem* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975) p. 135.

(...) We have nothing but we can do anything with it.” This absurdly empty, senseless claim while looking for “the basic rule” takes the two of them to not doing anything again: they breathe, run circles, live. Knowing that after a search like this comes happiness and fear. The deeds of the absurd figure are accompanied by anxiety and existentialist experiences. Yet anxiety only exists in traces in *Burial*, ironically: the Actor talks about the possibilities of freedom at a time when this question is not raised in this way by the reader and literary works – Nádas’s play is partly about depicting an absurd, ironic picture of the absurd character.

One aim of the absurd and post-absurd theatres of protest is “pure theatricality”: creating model situations with schematically characterised protagonists, introducing general human gestures. *Burial* also uses this tradition and can be interpreted partly in this, as the figures of the Actor and the Actress are emphatically impersonal, even regarding their outlook, yet it also has links to reality: the characters of the ritual play live in an explicitly historical space, in the Hungary of the 1970s – they have a definite age and pre-history. Both aims (that of impersonality and personality) are present in *Burial*.

As for the spectator-interpreter, the play expects her to make a similar double movement. Not only *Burial* but also the audience is beyond the absurd. And not only the play but also the reader treats some questions, answers, or simply the possibility of raising some questions, with a certain amount of irony. Similarly, the play and the spectator move together when they face traditional and already rejected questions again and again, and then radically distance themselves from these. Nádas plays with two different codes of interpretation in *Burial*: the stage appears as the world, a space which cannot be continued, a phantasm world in which the spectator’s desire for realism seems to be unnecessary and ridiculous – the very fact that striving to create the history of the two characters and to give a story to them, s/he believes the frameworks that have been offered. It is the basically realist, moralist, and word-bounded nature of the Western drama that Nádas criticises. He plays with this tradition knowing that he stands in it, just as the reader or spectator does. *Burial* is about a crisis: the crisis of the subject, its possibilities that have been seen as real in our culture, and about the crisis of talking about itself. The play fits into many different dramatic traditions, it can be related to many kinds of theatrical endeavours. But it differs from them in a basic factor of interpretation: the reader/spectator has to reflect on these traditions as parts of the past, and also raise the question as to what extent it is possible and worthwhile to approach it with the questions she has been used to, and to what extent it is possible to ask new questions. Nádas plays with a basic constituent of reception: the horizon of

expectation. As soon as the spectator finds the weakest position of resistance and adheres to the realistic tradition of the stage, creating pre-histories for the actors, or accepting the stories they offer, the “honest” scene turns out to be an experiment, a role play. Still, the spectator keeps returning to the former expectations, according to which the actors (as characters) stand as “real” subjects in front of her.

The interpreter of *Burial* also has to question the way we watch a play today: what possibilities writing and reception have after the illusionary theatre of naturalism and the abstract-alienated theatre, how the play merges these into itself and terminates them while reflecting on their lack, and not only on the lack of these forms, but also on that of preconditions that have stood beyond them, like the unity of the individual, the possibility of role playing, the existence of truth, love, freedom, self-determination or acceptance of being directed, volition, being ruled, the “elementary complicity,”⁶ the making up of the rules: our transcendental concepts.

II. “THE PROBLEM MAY BE THAT I SEE. I CONSTANTLY SEE THAT WE ARE”

The Actor and the Actress, while playing their roles, sometimes insist on being “honest,” or being honest in their roles. The Actress draws the conclusion that it could not be otherwise:

ACTRESS: Do you think we should not involve ourselves?

ACTOR: Why are you asking that?

ACTRESS: Because you are resisting.

ACTOR: You do it insidiously, and this hurts my moral sensitivity to a certain extent, but if it wasn't about me, I would say it was not without interest.

ACTRESS: We've brought our own body here.

ACTOR: It is trained.

ACTRESS: We are still talking about ourselves, whatever we do against it.

ACTOR: This has its boundaries, too.

ACTRESS: There's no text now. And there's no scenery. Only this prison garb.

ACTOR: This is what we have to play.

(pp. 246-47)

The text turns on its back again here: the actors arrive at the notion that they have to play “honesty” – “as if it was not as if.” But does not playing that one is not playing

⁶ Péter Nádas, “Vagyunk” in *Nézőtér* (Budapest: Magvető, 1983) p. 19.

suggest that there is nothing else but playing? That being constrained into roles is the only possible way of life?

A character of André Gide, Édouard says: “Psychological analysis lost all its interest for me when I realised that people live what they imagine to live. What follows from this is that they imagine to live what they really live ...”⁷ Nádas begins to think of taking this for granted, and this does not spoil his interest in psychological analysis: but he has to work out such a psychology which contains the knowledge that the subject cannot reach itself with reason, as it has no existence that is independent of its experiences. The attempts of the actors go round this experience that has become self-evident, knowing also that if they speak, there is always some possibility for roles – they get to the point where it is language that acts and accomplishes, not their “selves.” As soon as one of them seemingly begins to talk about her- or himself, or about her/his personified self, the spectator becomes absorbed by the stage situation. And then the actors ruthlessly remind her that they were playing (and they themselves are reminded by their prescribed texts): “We’ve been doing it fairly well. ... Actually, I’m also satisfied” (p.222). These points of access are probably the most ironic in the play, because their irony is multiple: not only the actors and their play is put into the mirror-position of reflection, but the spectator as well, who has just become absorbed in the view of the stage as it had been customary in earlier dramatic traditions, but these times she has to re-examine her interpretative *role*.

Nádas sets the actors and the interpreting spectator a huge task, and places much in their hands. It is only by deconstructing their own behaviour and relationships that they can get inside that game. Only thus is it possible to identify with the roles and the role-players and to break out of the game and the interpretative space created by the roles. And all this raises the question whether there is a continuous self that lives through these metamorphoses of experience and experiments.

According to a sentence of the Actor, the constant consciousness about one’s role-playing is not good either: one who can only see himself from outside becomes paralysed. The Actor says this during one of their discussions after a game when they are thinking about (or play that they are thinking about) the way the emotions they perform affect them:

⁷ André Gide, *A pénzhamisítók / A pénzhamisítók naplója [Les Faux-Monnayeurs / Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1925, 1927)], transl. Pál Réz (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1981), p. 77.

ACTOR: I feel you are stronger because you can still go on. This is why I loved you.

ACTRESS: It's simple. I'm not thinking of anything.

ACTOR: The problem may be that I see. I constantly see that we are.

(p. 267)

With this sentence Nádas asks about the self of his actors as he did of Richard Swartz: "Did you imagine there was something that had another side?" And he himself answered immediately, saying no. There is not anything but sides.⁸ The reflection of the self on one of its roles can only be imagined as part of a role.

No wonder *Burial*, although it questions the belief in essentiality, easily lends itself to ways of interpretations that suppose transcendence. The interpretative horizon of the play is basically defined by the way the reader interprets the concepts of role-playing and truth. Those who regard role-playing attitudes as some kind of falsity in itself, and who believe that there is an essence before or behind cognition, that truth has an independent existence, are bound to see a kind of apocalyptic question in the play. The role in which somebody questions all of his/her roles because s/he cannot leave them unreflected, shows a desire for such a degree of consciousness that can really be called "tragically ethical." The same duality characterises the role of the author in the play. There are two characters in front of the spectator, who are not intended to take the shape of real characters, but they have voices and bodies, yet they only know about their own existence, they only exist when they are on the stage. They do not have the power not to be there. Their speech shows that they long for an embodiment that is outside language and beyond the author, but of course their speech is created by the author, the stage is the totality of their existence, the play is their reality. Péter Balassa's expression applies well to the theatre that is so much directed by the author: *Burial* is characterised by a "daring and forward pressing anachronism."⁹

⁸ Péter Nádas, Richard Swartz, *Párbeszéd* (Pécs: Jelenkor, 1992) p.62.

⁹ Péter Balassa, "... Híába üres, nem táj ..." Nádas Péter: Nézőtér" in: *Észjárások és formák* (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1985), p.198.

III. "AND YOU STILL ACT AS IF THERE WAS AN AS IF"

Nádas gets to the boundaries of creating theatre and interpreting roles in *Burial*, and faces these boundaries – this reflexivity is what gives the irony of the play. But he cannot move beyond them. And in the last part, when the actors imagine a “beautiful performance,” he steps out of self-reflection, and reflects on the genre of the drama parodistically:

ACTRESS: Let’s imagine.

ACTOR: That’s what we are doing.

ACTRESS: Wild sensuality.

ACTOR: A lot of superfluous movements.

ACTRESS: Some humour. Not much.

ACTOR: Political piquancy.

ACTRESS: Dreams. By all means.

ACTOR: Philosophy. A sense that is deeper than deep. Seriousness.

ACTRESS: And a lot of cruelty. Filth, dishonour, dagger.

(pp. 289-90)

The list expands even further. After this they get to where they do several times in the play: the declaration that “they can do anything,” but they do not dare, and they do not dare or cannot get over this in their speech either.

Burial, with its speaking about the possibilities of drama and the theatre at least as much as about the clumsy attempts of the two created figures to separate what is “they themselves” in their acts and what is role-playing, with its being a metadramatic work, in which the writer has a very significant role even in his silence, shows and celebrates the creative imagination and mirrors an uncertainty not only about the validity of representation, but also that of “reality.”¹⁰

The game thus shows that language and speech are not independent systems of describing things, but they actively create the world and the subject’s knowledge of the world. Speaking about drama in a dramatic form aims at exploring and unveiling the relationship between the world of the fictive space and the world outside the fictive space. If as individuals we have “roles” rather than “selves,” examining the characters

¹⁰ Cf. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 2.

of the drama can be a useful model about the construction of the subjects that exist in the world outside the drama. If we can gain our knowledge of the world through language and speech, then a play in which two characters can make a world only with their speech, is a useful model of the construction and constructedness of “reality.” The first act of *Burial’s* actors is the construction of a rule. After they have both touched the coffins which they are in, and they have said this, the Actress and the Actor makes up two interrelated rules of the game: “We’ll act as if we had not seen anything,” the first says, and this is continued in a concrete rule: “We mustn’t step off the stair. Let this be the first rule” (pp. 201-202). This exclusion, their deliberate unconsciousness is needed so that they can be able to step into the game. This is the point where the play becomes reflexive and self-reflexive: it reflects on the drama and the existence of the actors as well. When the Actress later says about the coffins, the space of the coffins that “it remained here,” and the Actor affirms it with a “there,” it becomes obvious that what restrains them (that they can only create reality if they are not all the time conscious of its constructed nature) will be present in the space and in their minds at the same time throughout the play.

Any text that calls the reader’s attention to the process of its creation, because it disturbs her/his conventional expectations regarding meaning and the finality of the possibilities of meaning, also problematizes more or less explicitly the way certain narrative codes – which can be both “literary” and “social”– create seemingly “real” and imaginary worlds in accordance with certain ideologies, while regarding them as transparently “natural” and “eternal.” What is the most conspicuous observing the structure of the drama in the cross-section of literary tradition is the way Nádas’s *Burial* plays with Wittgenstein’s idea that “we think we go round and round that nature of the thing while circumscribing the frame through which we look at the thing.”¹¹ Nádas in this play approaches the “nature” of things obviously through speaking about the frame.

¹¹ Quoted by Waugh p. 27-28.

IV. "THE RULE IS MYSELF AND YOURSELF, MY BODY AND YOUR BODY"

There is a part at the beginning of the play and the speech-attempts in which the Actor begins to imitate the Actress:

ACTRESS: What are we going to play today?

silence

ACTOR: What are we going to play today?

long silence

ACTRESS: Why are you imitating me?

ACTOR: Why are you imitating me?

very long silence

ACTRESS: You know what kind of habit imitating is.

ACTOR: This is just what I'm thinking about.

(pp. 203-204)

Imitation, becoming the other is an essential element of theatre and drama: it creates the space in which the personal and the common meet. The Actor and the Actress cannot but start by imitating each other: their first sentences that set their position also mirror each other, as they are in the same place. ("Are you too in it?" "Are you in it, too?" "A surprise." "A trap." "We'll act as if we had not seen anything." "We'll deceive ourselves." "Let's go from here." "Back." "We mustn't step off the stair. Let this be the first rule." "Let." "It remained here." "There." [pp. 201-202]) This point of differentiation is what begins the play in which both of them attempt to get to some kind of unity in different ways. The Actress's point of departure is that the coffins remained in the space of her play, and the Actor's is that it is possible to disregard the frame. It cannot be decided whether one is the position of the incapability of being absorbed and giving oneself and the other makes one able to play, or the contrary: the first is the only possible claim of honesty, and the other tends to lie. Because both of them are both. The two differently narcissistic persons try to create a unified world (or to create a world in which they can see themselves as unified) in different ways.

There are of course times when they play not against but together with each other. The text makes them switch the codes of different realities in a way that makes it almost impossible to notice the shifts between them. When they perform a scene of getting acquainted and one of them asks if it is good for them, and the other says she

hopes it is, it can be valid in both of their roles: it can be part of the situation game and reflection as well. This is the scene when the image of the emotion that fills the whole body comes up for the first time (the Actress later uses it when she declares and details her love): “I feel it so much that I almost blow up. One feels it in her breast, stomach, in her thighs. Everywhere” (p. 242). With its exaggeration, words that are becoming empty, the answer is stepping out of the game – they slowly finish the scene and discuss why “the whole thing is senseless, empty, bad” (p.244).

V. “THERE WAS A MOMENT WHEN I REALLY FELT SOMETHING”

The ritual play is sinister, ceremonial. Nádas’s actors are also serious and ceremonial in their white funeral garbs. *Burial*’s ritual play, written for a worldly stage framed by the burial, the being beyond life, gives the possible reading of a rite that is usually the organised expression of the prescribed customs of a religious belief or a kind of social behaviour. The text of the play that reflects on itself and its possibilities, expands the meaning of rites in the latter sense: speech itself, like all kinds of relationships, every manifestation of the subject, and even the subject imagining itself to have an independent existence becomes a ritual in it. Victor Turner writes in his book about the process of the development of the ritual that “the individual has a significant role as a representative and maintaining force of the culture in ritualised and modern societies as well, after it understands it through a long and painful process.” *Burial* as a play also strives “to understand itself,” its own determinations and the possibilities of drama, and this also mirrors the actors’ desire for self-knowledge. They have to represent a culture in which the individual cannot fully rule its acts, and it is not an entity that freely governs itself. While the Actress warns the Actor that he is not talking about his own memories (“None of your words are yours, you’ve learned every gesture. How could you have memories?” [p. 279]), he remembers October 1956, the sound of shots. “And in that silence we could hear the guns. And we were standing in that silence as if we had to decide about it, decide something that could be the most natural” (p. 280). And he utters this sentence while he is thinking about and is afraid of mixing something into his play that he should not, that is himself, his memory. The historical situation that is quoted, the situation of the Actor in the play, the position of the actor who plays the Actor, and that of the play thinking about its own traditions, and the position of the subject that wants to have an overview of life, all rhyme with each other: all of them are given, but it seems as if agents had to decide. The individual takes its position in history upon itself in this ritual, and talks about this burden.

Nádas's actors in *Burial* ritually experience their roles, themselves, and each other. They play for instance that the Actress imagines herself into the Actor's story, getting into it. They agree upon that

ACTOR: One makes up a story so that he won't have to say something, and he is still there in it.

ACTRESS: One says what one feels and still it seems as if she'd made it up. Yet everything is true.

(pp. 286-87)

But when they say about a moment that it is real, it has already been built into the consciousness of the audience that all of their attempts are games. When they feel that they "could begin the performance" after a break, they get back to the initial imitation and silence:

ACTRESS: I thought you knew it.

ACTOR: I thought you knew it.

silence.

(p. 204)

There is a significant analogy between pre- and post-individual theatre: the self is not a stabile entity but a terminal locus of roles and relations in both of them. After the modernist theatre, the object of interest is not the individual character, but the grammatical or social system: not only the feeling that the individual radically depends on impersonal cultural systems, but also that the subject that is dependent in this way is constructed, created by speech, fluctuating.

VI. "WE'VE GOT USED TO IT THAT WE ALWAYS HAVE TO TALK SO THAT SOMETHING IS"

In sections I. and III. I have already talked about how *Burial* uses and thematizes the concept of the "frame": about the characteristic feature of self-reflective works that it is impossible in the end to tell the difference between what is "framed" and what is "unframed." These works show the problematic nature of the way narrative codes operate: they question the difference between "real" and the "imaginary." Although the link between literary and social narrative codes is not at all self-evidently direct, it can be said that if the conscious realisation of the operation of codes, showing how

preconceptions influence the perception of the interpreter, have a basic function in a work of art, it is not easy to set up this boundary. When *Burial* shows how convention operates in literary works and interpretations, how it rules the plot and one's being absorbed in a situation, it also mirrors how the frame works in- and outside the space of the play. This is also at stake in the questions *Burial* raises about the shifts of the frame, rules and freedom.

Nádas's aim is partly to show reality, and partly to show the battle for the stylisation of reality and why the Actor and the Actress feel compelled to stylise reality. Since the characters are actors, the fight between what reality offers them and what they want to make of it, or what it is possible to make of it, can be the object of their play. But *Burial* shows this strife in the relationship of the stage and the spectator as well: the interpreter wants to make something of the play when s/he puts it into the frame of theatrical realism again and again, albeit an essential function of the ritual is to deconstruct theatrical realism. It shows that the forms of expression are signs, the meaning of which rely on conventions, systems, not on some inherent characteristics: conventions, however, are unreal and unstable.

"I'm playing that this gesture is done by me, at this moment. I'm playing that this sentence is said by me, at this moment. And is it not me if I say, if I do what others have imagined about me?" the Actor asks (pp.274-75). *Burial* renders the subject as a performance just as it does with what can be called reality. And not as a performance that shows the freedom of the subject – the ritual does not leave much space for liberty. I use the word "performance" in the sense Judith Butler gave to in her works analysing the concept of gender. Butler gave this name to the process during which the subject gains its identity through sexual socialisation. This concept of the performance-act can be derived from the theory of mimesis, and it sets two aspects of mimesis, reflection and imitation into play. Any approach that is not conscious of its ideological roots, tends to depict things in accordance with the reflection model. The definition of literature as something that reflects reality is the equivalent of Butler's claim that the relationship between sex and gender has also traditionally been depicted by the reflection model. However, this logic can be changed: Butler says that gender, like imitation in a theatrical performance, creates the effect of reality (and does not mirror reality).¹² The same is going on in *Burial* on Nádas's stage: it is comfortable readings that assume the existence of a "reality" that are made impossible by unveiling the parts of the performance as speech attempts. Nádas deconstructs the subject and its relations to reality the way Butler deconstructs gender. Nádas uses truth and reality, even the

¹² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) p. 134-141.

historical reality of the Actor and the Actress in such a way that he does not only give evidence of the truth, a description of the time in which the subjects of the actor characters were formed, but also an experience that allows the change and transformation of our relationship with ourselves and our cultural/historical universe – our ways of knowledge.

According to Foucault, this kind of play with truth and fiction makes it possible for us to see clearly what links us to our modernity. The experience that makes it possible for us to differentiate between certain mechanisms (remembrance as creating truth and the formation of the subject) and to separate ourselves from them by seeing them in a completely different form, must be the same. “Starting from those experiences, it is necessary to give way to a transformation, a metamorphosis, that has elements that are not only subjective but also accessible for others: which means that this experience must to a certain extent be able to link to a collective practice and way of thinking.”¹³

Making the position and the conditionality of the subject conscious in the most collective form that is possible, in a ritual: that is what goes on in *Burial*. The ritual interprets the individual and the individual interprets the rite: Nádas’s play performs the deconstructive reading of its own suppositions and possibilities. It talks about the way we read: the way the subject reads its own boundaries.

¹³ David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault. Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 25.