

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE CHILD NARRATOR AND THE MAGICAL REALISM IN GYÖRGY DRAGOMÁN'S NOVEL *THE BONFIRE*

Abstract: The main issue of the novel *The Bonfire* (Original title: *Máglya*¹) by the Hungarian writer György Dragomán is the confrontation of the child narrator (a 13-year old girl) with the traumas of the twentieth century which marked her parents' and grandparents' life and are still influencing her life in the post-communist era. The first premise of the central argument is that the child's special point of view determines the perception of history and forgiveness. The second premise is that this point of view can be analysed in the context of the magical realism conception developed by Tamás Bényei. According to this, magic realism is a mode of writing, so the appearance of magic is a rhetorical, not an ontological question. The magic provides a language, through which the elements of reality get meanings and can be integrated into a system. One of the main conclusions is that the magical realism manifested through a child's perspective can be an efficient mode of representing not only the collective and individual traumas, but also the process of forgiving and healing them.

Key words: child narrator, magic realism, trauma, forgiveness, post-communism

The representation of the regime change

In the last two and a half decades the change of the regime has become an important subject of representation. Some recent studies on this subject include the works of Imre József Balázs and Zsófia Szilágyi. Balázs is interested in the representation of the change of the regime in the Transylvanian novels (Balázs 206 – 219). Szilágyi Zsófia in her paper *Regim Change in Absurdistan* discusses the appearance of this topic in the Hungarian language novels published in Slovakia. Both authors agree that the representation of the change of the regime is mainly the story of disillusionment. The list is not complete, but the regime change

¹ Budapest, Magvető, 2014. The subsequent quotations refer to this edition. The novel has been translated to Romanian: *Rugul*, translated by Ildikó Gábos-Foartă, Polirom, 2015. The English translation is due 2017.

is an important topic in the following novels : *Ádám Bodor: The Sinistra Zone* (1992), *The Archbishop's visit* (1999), *The Birds of Verchovyna*; Lajos Grendel: *Einstein's Bells* (1992), Andrea Tompa: *The House of the Executioner* (2011), Sándor Zsigmond Papp: *Small lives* (2011). After the publication of the mentioned theoretical works, even more novels appeared which can be added to this list, as an example: Róbert Csaba Szabó: *Transformers* (2016), Dragomán György: *The Bonfire* (2014).

In the Hungarian literature *Ádám Bodor* has created a language and a technique of narration which seems to be suitable for representing the totalitarian dictatures of Central and Eastern Europe. In this novels, a referential reading is always obstructed, but the fictive region, where cultures, names and languages are mixed, reminds of Northeastern Transylvania. Bodor's novels can be interpreted as a representation of the history of the past thirty years: in *The Sinistra Zone*, the military dictatorship of the mountain hunters evokes the totalitarian dictatorship. The second novel, *The Archbishop's visit* represents the change of the regime. However, in fact, the hierarchy of the power has not changed, only its legitimate basis changed: the mountain hunters changed their uniform and dressed up as monks. In the third novel, *The Birds of Verchovyna*, thus the power is drawn into the background, it is present everywhere and works according to economic interests (Balázs 206-208).

The narration techniques, the chronotopes, the structure of Dragomán's novels are in a clear connection with Bodor *Ádám's* oeuvre. *Bányai Éva's* work proved the influence of *Ádám Bodor* on the mentioned generation, on Dragomán, Papp and others. She names this phenomenon „postbodorian” stream (Bányai 138). So, it is justifiable to look at Bodor's novels as a point of reference when talking about the representation of the change of the regime (Balázs 207).

The main part of the representation of the change of the regime is the story of disillusionment (Szilágyi www.kortaronline.hu/2009/06/rendszerzavaltasabszurdisztanban/412 1). The principal idea of this novels is that nothing essential has changed in the regime change: the individuals were not ready for a change, or, even worse, they were ready to continue the life, the rituals and the behavior patterns they lived according to before the revolution (Balázs 209).

From the point of view of history of literature, for Balázs (209) it seems that representing the formal regime and the revolution is very important for those authors who

were born in the late 1960-s, early 1970-es (but not only, of course). As an example, Andrea Tompa is born in 1968, Cristian Mungiu, whose movie *Tales from the Golden Era* is also a representation of the communist era, in 1971. György Dragomán is born in 1973 in Târgu-Mureş and has been living in Hungary since 1988.

Imre József Balázs in his work mentioned that the representation of the change has many forms, but a significant common feature is the perspective of the child in the narration (Balázs 210).

Dragomán György's most important novel is *The White King* (2005), which was translated into more than 30 languages. The narrator is a boy, whose childhood events are marked by the aggression of the repressing regime. The place and time of the plot can be recognized only by references to the Chernobyl disaster. The lack of freedom is in the focus of this novel.

The Bonfire can be interpreted as the continuation of the previous book. The time and place of the action are closely after the revolution in a small town of Romania. The main questions are what happens after the revolution, how can the individual and the society deal with the suddenly gained unlimited freedom. What happens to the collaborators of the former regime? Is there any chance for a new beginning, or only the regime's denomination will change, the leaders will remain the same informers, like in Bodor's novel *The Archbishop's visit*? What would be the new generation's right behavior with the collaborators of the former regime and with their stories of life? The novel *The Bonfire* has some answers and even behavior models for these questions. Emma, the protagonist is the representative of the new generation. She has to deal with the relation between the secret police and her family. The perspective of this child is a magical one, so the novel can be interpreted using the terms of the magical realism.

Magical realism

In the magical realist novels the magical events are presented by the narrator as ordinary events in a realist story. The magical realist narrative mode is considered to be "a tolerant and accepting way of fiction" (Bowers 24). Bowers cites Amaryll Chanady, who explains that this narrative mode relies on "the absence of obvious judgments about the

veracity of the events and the authenticity of the worldview expressed by the characters in the text” (Chanady qtd. in Bowers 3). Magical realism presents the realistic and the magical approach to the world being equally important. The reader has to “follow the example of the narrator in accepting both realistic and magical perspectives on reality on the same level” (Bowers 3). The magical adjective emphasizes the mystique side of life. The variety of extraordinary occurrence cannot be explained by concepts of the rational way of thinking, including the appearance of ghosts, disappearances, miracles, extraordinary abilities, strange atmospheres (Bowers 19).

The Hungarian literary theorist Tamás Bényei is more interested in the poetics of the magical realism rather than formulating a general theory of it. He defines magical realism as a mode of writing. He argues that the analysis of the magical realist novels must show what kind of poetic and metaphysical preconceptions generate the appearance of an extraordinary occurrence. Furthermore, it is required to analyze the rhetorical, stylistic and figurative techniques which express these assumptions, preconceptions.

Bényei assumes that the term magic realism is not an oxymoron. He approaches the connection of the two terms from an anthropological point of view. Realism, being considered a kind of mimesis, is rather a part of the magical ritual, than being its opposite. For example, the shaman dramatizes or tells the story of the illness, the cure, the recovery or even death. So the conclusion is that there is a complementary - supplementary relation between magic and realism (Bényei 74).

The world of the novel becomes the place of the magic figurativity. The most conspicuous constituent of the magicalness of the magic realism is the **magical causality** (Bényei 82) where causality appears as a magical activity that seeks to reveal secret connections between the objects of the world. Bényei argues that “magical realism - suspecting a supplementary relationship between [the magical and the ordinary causality] - bases its figurativity on the Nietzschean insight that our conception of the world, our talk of the world, be it «magical» or «rational» is always rhetorically constructed” (Bényei 93 qtd. in Schroeder 155). The magical causality appears due to the *double congestion*: the plot is full of magic events, and figurative logic bounds the overcrowded plot's elements. This logic creates metaphorical connections between the elements of the plot and the whole world represented in the novel. So each element of this world can be connected to the others, can get new

meanings. Bényei calls this the proliferation of the figurativity. The talisman words are a significant example of the proliferation of figurativity. The talisman words are words, in which a narrative, an occurrence is compressed into a figure, or, vice versa: an occurrence appears as a figure or a visual image (Bényei 98).

The mode itself has created the attribute magic as a properly impossible name for its impossible modality of reconstructing the world in and through language and narrative (Bényei 159). The text can be interpreted as magical, as it uses structural elements of the magical worldview. Also, narrative, structuring and figurative techniques metaphorically can be called magical. On the another hand, the magical attribute denominates the ontological and pragmatical position of the language and the narrative. The magical realist novels see the storytelling as an act. Magic is the expressed or unexpressed trope of this act (Bényei 80).

Tzvetan Todorov in his work *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* argues that the occurrence of the supernatural is always accompanied by the skepticism, hesitation of the characters (Todorov 42). The magic of the magical realism is not the fantastic described by Todorov, because the supernatural is showed as being natural, equally realistic and natural as the ordinary realistic. Bényei rejects defining magic by the differences from the fantastic. Instead of the epistemologically based binarity of real and supernatural he proposes an approach and reading based on rhetorics. In this reading, the textual world has more stratas: between real and magic there can be found many transitional stages: hyperboles, excessiveness, coincidences, repetitive events (Bényei 71).

Storytelling is a recurring topic of the magic realist novels. The storytelling represents a paradigmatic method to gather knowledge about the world, and it is also a way of understanding reality (Bényei 101). As an example, Bényei analyses Graham Swift's *Waterland*. In this novel, the aim of storytelling is the confession and the therapy of the main character.

The Bonfire – the plot

The protagonist and also the narrator of the novel is Emma, a 13-year old girl. The time of the plot is after a revolution, the characters still feel the effects of it, some are mourning their relatives. Although the chronotopes of the novel are not denominated, the

reader can identify the time of the plot with the year 1990 and the spatial frame with Romania. The chronotopes present some character traits of the post-communist era, but it is not the novel's aim to paint a detailed picture of this society.

After her parents' death, Emma gets to an orphanage. After a few months spent there, her maternal grandmother, whom she never met before, appears and takes the girl to her place in a faraway town. So Emma's upbringing is continued by Grandmother. She teaches her many magical acts. They draw onto the flour on the breadboard, make a bonfire and write their wishes and fears on the branches, make a man out of clay. Meanwhile, she is living the typical life of teenagers: goes to school, learns, writes homework. In the new school, she finds out interesting and ambiguous information about the past of her grandparents and gets acquainted with her parents' old friends. The past of her grandparents or, more precisely, the resentment or appreciation of the teachers toward her grandparents and the gossips mark Emma's life. She makes friends and falls in love. Her hobbies are drawing, painting and orienteering: she inherited these talents from her parents.

As the time of the plot is after a revolution, the citizens of the town consider that the most important thing is finding and punishing the collaborators of the former regime. Emma formulates some painful, hard questions about her past: was Grandfather a collaborator of the secret police? Who denounced her father? How did Grandfather die? Why was Grandmother interned into an asylum? Emma is brave enough to ask all these questions, and step by step she can reconstruct a part of her family's past.

Into Emma's narration is enclosed a secondary narrative level: Grandmother's narrative. In her second-person narration, the old lady tells her memories from her youth, the traumas she suffered during the Second World War and the persecution of the Jewish. Emma listens thoughtfully.

The focalization of the child

Bényei's anthropologically founded opinion is showing up in the analysis of the magical world of *The Bonfire*. Bényei considers that the magic is a language, whereby the components of the reality can be inserted into a system in which they get their meanings (Bényei 97).

Hereafter I will analyse why the child's imagination is appropriate to create a magical language and how do the fantasy and magic meet in the child's focalization.

Focalization is a term of narratology which refers to the perspective through which the narrative is presented and distinguishes the subjective perception of a certain character and the narrative voice (Füzi and Török). Emma's focalization can be described as a magical one. She finds a magical causality between objects and events. This focalization can be interpreted as characteristic for a teenager, as Emma's classmate also finds magical causality in her life. The goal of the magical approach is to reveal the truth, find out what has happened in the former regime and in the revolution.

Being an orphan child, Emma is a defenceless person. In the focus of the novel we find the child or teenager who has experienced trauma. The plot includes the relation of the defenceless child with the adult who is the owner of power, the subjection of the child appears in the communication with the authoritarian teachers. The homodiegetic narrator can show the events from a "bottom" perspective and shows that adults, even if they have good intentions, can't understand the subjected child. For example, in chapter One Emma is leaving her old school. The teacher does not find the appropriate words for the leave-taking, so she puts on the class to sing a song for their mate.

Emma's narrative voice uses the present tense. The other character's speaking is reported in Emma's narration as indirect discourse. This conversion also shows the subjection of the child, because she only reports, reproduces the speaking of others, but does not interpret them.

Magic is the denomination of an interpretation of existence. This interpretation has a rhetorical structure (Bényei 81). Emma gets different answers to her crucial questions from many points of view. The answer formulated by the magical occurrence is only one of those. When analysing the focalization, Bényei's concepts of magical causality and magical intuition (Bényei 82) should help us. Emma is trying to find the answer to the question referring to the grandparents' activity in the repressive former regime: where they informers of the secret police? She gets a lot of different answers from the gossips and the public opinion of the town, from the librarian woman, from the orienteering coach, from Grandmother. However, in the chapter Forty-two appears the chance to get an answer from the magical point of view. Emma found a sea shell in Grandmother's house. She put it to her ear and heard a strange

word: “ptynotem”² (Dragomán 433). She repeated this word until it got a meaning: not empty. In that moment Emma realised that this refers to the coffins, they were not empty. She had found out some time before that the martyrs of the revolution had not been buried, the bodies had been hidden in the forest, so only the empty coffins had been buried. However, by the seashell’s message she realised that the files of the secret police were hidden into the coffins and eventually she really found them.

In the novel’s figurative technique the seashell has an extended relation with the secret police. It is a magical object, because one can cry his or her secrets into it. The agent of the secret police who visited Grandmother, also drew a seashell on the fence.

The focalization of the child finds magical causality between the events. According to this, the exchange of dolls is interpreted as the exchange of fate. Kriszta is Emma’s classmate. She lost her twin sister in the revolution. Kriszta feels guilty, and she thinks that she should have died instead of her sister. She got this idea from the memory of a childhood event: they got two dolls as a gift. However, Kriszta thought that Réka’s doll was nicer than her, so on the quiet, while Réka was still asleep, she replaced her doll with her sister’s one. She interpreted this childhood event as a magical act, which resulted in the exchange of fates. Assuming the existence of magical causality, Kriszta felt responsible for her sister’s tragedy.

The sincerity, curiosity, susceptibility of the protagonist are some virtues specific to the childhood and teenage. These virtues have an important role in the perception of magical causality. Furthermore, these features make possible to ask the awkward questions again and again, and eventually get answers. So the magical act of storytelling depends on these questions and these virtues. The child’s virtues make magic come to life.

The curiosity and the will to violate prohibition leads getting to know history. The hovel scene (ch. 12) illustrates this. The events of history are compressed into a scene, where the occurrence cannot be explained rationally. The objects get magical function, and they have their reference in the past of the characters. These objects become the metaphors of history. The summary of the scene: Emma hears that someone cries in the hovel. Although Grandmother prohibited, Emma enters the hovel. There she finds a mess, all sort of old things. Nutshells are creaking under her feet. She finds a cradle and a crying rag doll. The doll is made of a yarn clew, the eyes are made of buttons, the mouth is drawn with lipstick.

² esnemür (My translation.)

An important characteristic of the magical realist writing mode is the zero tonality of the voice which narrates the supernatural occurrence. This tonality appears as the absence of wonderment, of exalted tone (Bényei 61). The perception indicates the presence of magic: “I snuggle the doll strong, and I feel that something stucks me (...) I get spooked, I put the doll back into the cradle. I hear the crying again. I say that everything is okay. I unbutton the doll’s dress, and I realize that its body is a rolled up yarn clew”³ (Dragomán 123).

Emma’s inner focalization shows the supernatural as it were natural. She does not formulate reflection on the strange situation. Instead, she acts according to the everyday experience which means that if someone cries, he or she needs consolation.

The objects (the yarn clew, the knitting needles, the nuts, the hovel) which can be found in this scene are, in fact, the accessories of a magical situation. These objects became metonymies that appear many times in the text, and they make a cross-reference between events which seem to be separated from each other, but in the deep holes of the personal memory of the characters they are related. In the fifth part of Grandmother’s intradiegetic narration these objects reappear. In the Second World War, when the Jews were persecuted, Grandmother, who was a teenage girl, hid her best friend Bertuka in the hovel. Bertuka was pregnant. She lied into a big chest full of nuts and knitted all day long. Eventually, the hide-out was found by the police, and Bertuka was killed.

At first lecture, the hovel scene appears as a par excellence magical occurrence. The rag doll may seem an exotic accessory of the voodoo witchcraft. However, after reading on and analysing the role of those reappearing objects, they become metonymies. They refer to personal history. The place of the objects in the hovel and also in the narrative level is not accidental; they have a meaning. The crying rag doll is the metaphor and metonymy of Grandmother’s compunction, sense of guilt. She felt guilty for Bertuka’s death. Nuts, nutshells appear many times and Grandmother always seems nervous when nuts as a nutritious food come into question. Nuts represent the remorse of those survivors, who feel guilty for the tragedies that had happened. The adventures in the hovel predict Emma’s role as a therapist: she is the one who asks questions which reveal the truth, and she is the one who consoles. Emma is defenceless as a child, but compensates it with asking.

³“Erősen magamhoz szorítom, és akkor azt érzem, hogy valami belém szúr. (...) Megijedek, visszateszem a babát. Megint meghallom a sírást. Azt mondom, semmi baj. Kigombolom a baba ruhácskáját, és látom, hogy a teste egy nagy nyolcasba tekert fonalgombolyag.” (My translation.)

Storytelling as a magical action

The novels in which we find the markers of the magical realistic mode of writing have an anthropological interest in the act of narration and in arranging the events into a narration. So these are self-reflective, metafictional texts. Bényei states that self-reflection is the result of the curiosity about the function of storytelling and about understanding narrations (Bényei 100). From this respect, in *The Bonfire* there can be found many of the magical realistic novel's features. The main concepts are the dramatization of the act of narration and the emotional determination of storytelling. For the characters is an existential question whether they can tell their story. From this aspect, I will analyse the context and the function of the intradiegetic narration of Grandmother, the stories told by other characters (included in the first-level narration as reported speech), the questions of history and truth, which are shown from multiple points of view and the metaphors of story-creating / creating of stories.

In the magic realist novels, the context of telling stories is also narrated. In *The Bonfire* a peculiar technique of the narration is that in the first level narration Emma often asks questions and Grandmother answers to them. Emma's curiosity and courage is manifesting when she asks Grandmother, but also other adults the awkward questions. These questions motivate the appearance of the intradiegetic narration, Grandmother's narrative. Emma's limited point of view is the result of her age. Grandmother's narration completes her limited focalization. There is a consequential connection between the two diegetic levels. So the progress of the plot depends on a dialogue situation. "I look at Grandma and I ask if it is true what people say about Grandpa? That he was an informer and that's why he killed himself?"⁴ (Dragomán 69). The narration continues with the answer of Grandmother. There are also shown the context, the circumstances in which the storytelling happens. This suggests that telling and listening of stories are important and distinguished actions in life, all the disturbing stimuli must be eliminated: "she waves her hand for me to close the notebook. She sits on my bed, draws up her knees, leans against the splash-cloth. She starts to speak"⁵

⁴ "Nagymamára nézek, úgy kérdezem meg, hogy igaz, amit Nagyapáról mondanak? Hogy besúgó volt, és azért ölte meg magát?" (My translation.)

⁵ "int, hogy csukjam be a füzetem. Leül az ágyamra, felhúzza a lábát, a falvédőnek dől. Beszélni kezd." (My translation.)

(Dragomán399).

The intradiegetic narration is fragmented into seven parts. Between two of Grandmother's storytelling acts there is a pause, while in the diegetic level many days pass away. These pauses are important, because the intradiegetic narrative explores traumas, bitter memories, so the addressee (receiver) needs time to comprehend all the information. Furthermore, during the pauses, curiosity intensifies, and this emotional state is a basic requirement in perceiving the magic of this world.

In the intradiegetic narration Grandmother tells her youthful traumas. It is a second person narration, so she apostrophizes herself, her granddaughter and the reader directly: "You are in a hospital; they say it is an asylum. Mad-house. They say that you are here because you were found in the forest, you were living in a cavity scooped in the ground"⁶ (Dragomán 196).

The intradiegetic narration begins with the end of the story: after Grandfather's death, Grandmother got her second amnesia, that is why she took Emma from the orphanage. The next part of the intradiegetic narration presents an event that happened a long time ago: the acquaintance of Grandmother and Grandfather in the lunatic asylum. Grandpa helped Grandmother to recover from amnesia and remember the shocking memories. The trauma the girl suffered is a terrible one: during the persecution of Jews, she tried to hide her friend Bertuka and all her family in the hovel, but eventually the police found them and killed the whole Jewish family and Grandmother's parents. The very last part of the intradiegetic narration tells the climax of the story, the execution of the two families.

Menyhért Anna's definition of the trauma: an event of life which causes harm. This event tears the victim out from time, out from the continuity of his her lifetime and also out from language, because trauma's main characteristic is that it is unmentionable, it cannot be told. The healing process is also strongly related to the nature of language because it happens when the patient finds the words for telling it. Through this process can heal a person or community. However, the process of telling is not simple at all. The memory of the trauma is not a narrative memory, it is not a story. It is fragmented, cannot be controlled, and memories may invade unexpectedly. Trauma, as a frozen moment, breaks the continuity between past

⁶ "Kórházban vagy, azt mondják, elmeógyógyintézet. Bolondokháza. Azt mondják, azért vagy itt, mert az erdőben találtak rád, egy földbe vájt odúban éltél" (My translation.)

and present.

The experience of the trauma is followed by the repression of the sad memory. In this novel the aim of the act of storytelling is therapy. Paul Ricoeur's treatise *Memory, History, Forgetting* assures relevant points of view in analysing the role of Grandmother's storytelling. Ricoeur discusses that the sense of the history may sicken if a community has experienced wars, territorial loss or other traumas. This community should be healed, and the healing process is analog with the one Freud described for the recovering from traumatic experience (Ricoeur 59). The experience of the trauma is followed by the repression of the sad memory. However, a repetition compulsion takes the place of the memory. The patient is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of remembering it as something belonging to the past (Freud qtd. in Ricoeur 59). The role of the analyst is to have infinite patience with the patient who suffers from repetition compulsion (Ricoeur 60).

Applying this theory on the novel, Grandmother is the patient, who experienced the trauma of witnessing the execution of her parents, her best friend and her family. Grandmother feels guilty, responsible for their death because she hid the Jewish family in the hovel. The trauma is a memory that cannot be forgotten. Grandmother had amnesia attacks three times. Her amnesia is a fake healing, which, in fact, is the repression of the memory (Bényei 372-373). The principal characteristic of the trauma is that it cannot be verbalized. It is manifested in visual and sensual ways (Menyhért 25). In Grandmother's case the manifestations are related to the hovel, the place of the tragedy: she prohibits Emma entering the hovel. She winces and becomes nervous when she talks about walnut because the Jewish family was eating walnut during the hiding in the hovel.

Grandmother's first therapist was Grandfather, whom she met in the lunatic asylum. They both suffered from repetition compulsion: Grandmother tried to run away to the forest. Grandfather had a suitcase full of broken tiles and tried to piece them together in vain. Eventually, Grandmother helped him, and together they succeeded in piecing together the broken jug; this object became a metaphor for their love. At this moment the repetition compulsion stopped, and Grandmother remembered her traumas. Grandfather healed her saying it was not her fault. The second therapist is the granddaughter Emma, who behaved just like Sigmund Freud had proposed in his works: she attentively and patiently listened to Grandmother's speech. When needed, she had the courage to ask uncomfortable questions: "Is

it true what people say, that you were treated in the madhouse?” So Grandmother had to continue the story and to face the facts of the past. As a result, Grandmother was released from the sad memories. Judith Herman also emphasises the importance of verbalization. She considers tht trauma has no context. (Herman, 55) So Emma has to reconstruct the original context of Grandmother’s traumas. For example, when she is solving mathematics homework, Grandmother tells a story in which the prime numbers have an important role.

Narrating her own story is a paradigmatic way of understanding reality, of accepting the experience of temporality for Grandmother. She formulates self-reflections on her storytelling method regarding the past, memory and forgetting.

“The most painful stories must be told in such manner, that the listener gets the feeling that this has happened to him/her, this is his/her story”⁷ (Dragomán 96). This sentence is a self-reflective figure of the novel. It explains why the intradiegetic level is needed to be embedded into the diegesis. Grandmother’s speaking could have been transformed into indirect speech, as the other character’s stories were. However, the embedded story’s self-torturing honesty has a bigger effect; it strikes the reader directly. The sentence reminds of Bényei’s conception about the complementary and supplementary relation between magic and reality. In an anthropological point of view, magic is the act of mimesis. The events are played or told, while a transformation in the receiver’s soul is expected. (Bényei 74). The present tense narration is making the events present. A possible referential reading can identificate the chronotoposes: the year 1990, the place is Romania. The text doesn’t name this place and time, but it has some markers (there had been a revolution, the photo of comrade general had been torn off the wall) which suggest this referential interpretation.

Ache helps to remember, but not in a way that we remember only the pain because we must remember everything, since only what we remember, does exist, what we forget, that does not exist anymore, disappears from the past, disappears from the world. (...) Even the most important thing can be forgotten.⁸ (Dragomán 77)

Grandmother tells me to fall silent; sometimes that is easier. However, I must learn,

⁷“A legfájdalmasabb történeteket csak úgy szabad elmondani, hogy aki hallja, azt érezze, hogy vele történt meg, az ő története.” (My translation.)

⁸“A fájdalom segít emlékezni, de úgy, hogy mégse csak a fájdalomra emlékszünk, hanem mindenre, mert muszáj mindenre emlékezni, mert csak az van, amire emlékszünk, amit elfelejtünk, az nincs többet, eltűnik a múltból, eltűnik a világból. (...) Még a legfontosabb dolgokat is el lehet felejteni.” (My translation.)

that the more I stay silent, the harder keeping silent and speaking will be.⁹ (Dragomán 96).

This quotations regard the connection between remembering and forgetting. Keeping silent appears to be the cause of forgetting. This means that the not revived memories will be forgotten, or, more precisely, suppressed. Memory is the one that ensures continuity of past and present, the feeling of being part of the all-time consciousness. Memory keeps the dialectical relation between what Reinhart Koselleck formulates as the space of experience and horizon of expectation. (Koselleck 402). Paul Ricoeur, based on Koselleck's ideas, states two forms of forgetting: passive and active forgetting. The passive forgetting means that the repetition compulsion takes the places of remembering (Ricoeur 64). The amnesia caused by traumas of Grandmother is a manifestation of this. Everyone has an inclination towards passive forgetting. Grandmother formulates this: "Forgetting is just like a curse which sits on everyone's shoulder"¹⁰ (Dragomán 77).

The active forgetting is dominated by a selection controlled by a narrative. This forgetting forms narrative from the events, focusing on the story of the victims, not of the empowered (Ricoeur 63-66). The active forgetting is the aim of Grandmother; that is why she formulates narratives from her traumas. However, she has a second goal too: keeping alive and passing on the memory of the past she wants to ensure that Emma would have an expectation horizon of the future based on **forgiveness**. It is also a key word in Ricoeur's theory of history; it is the real solution for the traumas of the past. Forgiving means curing the memory, it is the final step of the mourning and ensures the existence of future for memory (Ricoeur 61). In the novel, Grandmother gains her end, because Emma not only gets to learn the past, but she undertakes it and forgives Grandmother for her mistakes. The girl decides to live with the old lady and save her life, despite finding out that Grandmother has been the informer of the secret police and sent to jail Emma's father.

A possible referential reading would lead to the conclusion that Grandmother's and Emma's acting show the process of trauma recovery: the only way to recover from trauma is confessing the sins of the past, to admit the collaboration with the repressing regime.

⁹ "Nagymama azt mondja, hallgassak csak, az néha könnyebb. De tudjam meg, hogy minél tovább hallgatok, annál nehezebb lesz a hallgatás és a beszéd is." (My translation.)

¹⁰ "[a] felejtés olyan, mint egy átok, amelyik ott ül mindenkinek a vállán" (My translation.)

Grandmother gives an example that the traumas of the twentieth century can be healed only by formulating a narrative of them. “to mourn is to learn to narrate otherwise. To narrate otherwise what one has done, what one has suffered, what one has gained, what one has lost” (Ricoeur and Antohi 23). Forgiveness should be the final phase of healing.

History and metaphors

The magic realist novels question the unitary view of history (Faris 11). One of the main issues of the novel’s history conception is that there is no definitive truth, as truth always depends on the point of view of the storyteller. Grandfather’s death is surrounded by the mystery created by the different versions of the tragedy. Emma’s new classmates call him an informer and say he committed suicide of cowardice. Grandmother becomes furious hearing this. She is convinced that „they” killed him and then hang him by the belt of his photo camera. Uncle Pali, the orienteering coach, claims himself being Grandfather’s friend. In his story, the secret police had killed Grandfather. He is convinced that truth will reveal and encourages Emma not to give up in finding it.

According to Paul Ricoeur, the construction of a narrative from the memories is the method to achieve the active forgetting (Ricoeur and Antohi 23). Four metaphors represent the constructing of narratives from memories. These are a key issue of this novel because its action is compressed in them. The intention of constructing narratives is realized in the following metaphors: the pieced together broken **jug** represents the bond between the grandparents. On the wall, there is a **photo** of Grandfather which has been torn into pieces and then fit and stick together. This photo is the representation of the mental picture which Grandmother had constructed about her beloved husband. These two metaphors suggest a finished narrative of the memories.

The **letter** torn to shreds is the evidence of Grandfather’s innocence (he was not an informer of the secret police). The letter was put together in a magic, supernatural situation. This occurrence is narrated by a focalization which oscillates between reality and magic. Magic appears as a form of imagination. The focalizator sees that a troop of ants arrives, and puts together the paper shred by shred. This event can have a logical explanation: she experienced an optical illusion. As she forced her eyes trying to read the writing of the pieces

of paper, the letters merged, started to move, as it were small black ants. However, the magical explanation has a stronger argument. The magical causality makes a connection between this event and one that took place at the beginning of the plot. Emma saved the ants from Grandmother's poison. Another time she gave sugar to them. So, in this case, a magic principle, which is known from the fairy tales – benefaction has its reward – starts to work. The ants are Emma's friends. They help her finding out the truth about her family's past.

The fourth metaphor for finding out the truth is the pile of **files** thrown back-up. It represents the moral obligation of reading the files of the secret police and finding out the truth. In consequence, it is also the metaphor of the expectation horizon. This pile of files appears at the end of the plot. So the novel is open-ended: it remains the final question: will the people put the files in order and read them, will the truth come to light? Will the society know the truth about the former regime and the secret police's reports, or only a few will have access to this information?

Bényei emphasizes the importance of **talisman words** in the magical storytelling. These are words which compress an occurrence into one picture, or, vice versa, they are pictures, events which turn into words (Bényei 98). In chapter Thirteen the "march trinket"¹¹ is a talisman word. This tiny trinket worn in honor of March has a gladful meaning for Emma. It reminds her the happiness of childhood because she got it from her father. The trinket represents a link between the happiness of past and the present full of new and unpleasant situations. Emma becomes joyous when she gets one in her new class, although she does not know who gave it. The trinket she got is a hand-made yellow flower. However, for Grandmother this object has a totally different meaning and evokes contrary feelings. For her, this object is not a trinket, but a yellow Star of David. Grandmother interprets the gift as a malicious attack and reference to her past. For her, it represents the break between past and present. Emma does not understand her anger, so, as an explanation, Grandmother expresses the memory condensed into this object. She tells about the moment when her and Bertuka's life changed. This happened on the day when Bertuka had to sew the yellow star onto her beautiful new coat. In the technique of narration, the talisman word has a role in suggesting the story condensed into it, and makes the intradiegetic narration evolve.

¹¹ "márciuska" (Dragomán, 129, my translation). In fact, it is the Romanian „mărțișor.” This word also marks that the space of the plot is a town in Romania.

Conclusions

This paper's purpose was a close reading of György Dragomán's novel using the conception and terminology of magical realism used by Tamás Béneyei in his work. Magic provides a language, through which the elements of reality get meanings and can be integrated into a system.

After summarizing the theoretical framework, the paper argued that the child's focalization realized the magical causality, which is the basis of magical view upon the world. The child protagonist's important character trait is the courage to ask questions and broaden her knowledge about the past. The dialogical structure motivates the embedding of the intradiegetic narrative. A repetitive plot structure organizes the growing up of the child. The construction of the child's identity and psychology reminds of magical rituals, as it contains repetition of situations, parallel events, storytelling is a question of life and death. Magic and reality are in a complementary relation in the child's focalization. Different mixtures are created, as in some events realism dominates, and magic is seen with hesitation, while in other events magic is seen as natural. As the child grows up, the magic perspective grows wider and helps her to interpret the real world and the role of recent history. The child is curious and docile; these traits determine her to learn from Grandmother not only the magic acts, but also the legacy of the past.

A close reading reveals the connection between magical perspective and the focalization of the child. Magic appears due to the intellectual effort of the beholder. Magic events occur when the beholder not only watches, but acts with the objects, using them or following their instruction. The focalization of the child observes and emphasizes those small objects which will start to act as metaphors or metonymies.

In the novel, there are more variants of the strategies of storytelling specific for the magic realism. The aim of constructing a narration of the events of the past is to give them as a legacy for the next generation so they would form an expectation horizon. The unknowable truth and history appear in the intersection of different personal narratives. The magical point of view is the result of the focalization of the child. The metaphors and the talisman works get their meaning in the magical world through this child's focalization, the child sees the magical connection between objects and events. The past can be learned through narratives. Four

metaphors represent the narratives which must be constructed for learning the past. These metaphors suggest the phases of dealing with the memories: there are finished, organized constructions. These give comfort, and they are part of the active forgetting (the jug, Grandfather's photo). Magical interpretation is one possible way of reconstructing the events (the letter pieced together by the ants). The pile of files represents the urging obligation of the community to deal with the memories of the former regime.

The goals of storytelling are therapy, active forgetting and forgiveness. The reconciliation with the memories of the past has two important methods. The first is revealing them by telling the truth. The second is listening to them attentively, patiently and forgiving. The child, as a character, has time to listen, is curious and open-hearted. As a conclusion, the focalization of a child can effectively show the forgiveness and the healing of the traumas of the past. The child's focalization has a close, organic relation to magic. The novel questions the construction of history in the post-communist era, and represents the obligation of the new generation to find out the secrets of the repressing regime.

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