

The Danube as Cultural Body/Space¹

Diána Sóki
sokidia@gmail.com

Abstract. I have chosen Mór Jókai's novel, *Timar's Two Worlds* and Péter Esterházy's *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn*. The travellers and the narrators of these texts are different, but from a certain viewpoint they are comparable: they try to understand their own milieu and find out what is missing from their life with the help of the Danube. The various aspects change the ways is strongly represented in both texts. The main questions of the study are directed by the Danube, which is a factual and nominal line at the same time. I try to reveal the role, the function, and the meaning of the river in the novels, while drawing a parallel between the two texts. The analysis goes through intertextuality with help of the viewpoint of narratology and the mentioned one can grasp the constructive force of the river through other mediums, not only with the help of other texts, but inside the writings as well, I also touch the topic of intermediality. Consequently, I study the Danube as a text and as a deposit of other texts, namely the Danube as textual and geographical space, as a body in this space, as corpus, as human body, and as the body of the land.

Keywords: intermediality, intertextuality, historical, cultural and mental spaces, travelling observer, Danube, Mór Jókai, Péter Esterházy

The paper uses the complex phenomenon of the Danube to analyse, based on two texts written at different times, how the river as a decisive element of space and (its inscriptions on) the human body relate to each other, how they reflect through each other and what kind of attitudes and approaches they convey. I compare two texts: Mór Jókai's novel published after the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867,² entitled *Timar's Two Worlds*,³ and Péter Esterházy's novel, *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn (down the Danube)*,⁴ published after the 1989 regime change.⁵ The spaces of both texts are heterogeneous, allowing the examination of how the text creates the human body and a historical, cultural and mental space through the construction of the image of the Danube and its meanings.

¹ The study is a revised version of the BA thesis supervised by Mónika Dánél, written for the ELTE, BTK, MA, Hungarian-German department, and it was created within the project *Space-ing Otherness. Cultural Images of Space, Contact Zones in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Film and Literature* (OTKA NN 112700).

² Hungary and the Habsburg Empire had co-existed since 1526, and the compromise laws of 1867 gave new legal form, new frame for the cohabitation to last for another half century.

³ Jókai Mór: *Az arany ember (Timar's Two Worlds)*. <http://mek.oszk.hu/00600/00688/00688.pdf> 1994 [1872]
Mór Jókai: *Timar's Two Worlds*. Translated from Hungarian Mrs. Hegan Kennard. New York. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31409/31409-h/31409-h.htm> 2010. [*The Man with the Golden Touch*, 1888]

⁴ Esterházy Péter: *Hahn-Hahn grófnő pillantása (The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn)*. Budapest: Magvető Publishing, 1990

Péter Esterházy: *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn (down the Danube)*. Translated from Hungarian by Richard Aczel. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999

⁵ In 1989, in Eastern-Europe, alongside with the elimination of state socialism the decisive turns of the democratic transition also took place, which led to the first free Hungarian democratic election in 1990, after the fall of socialism.

The protagonists of both novels are male identities travelling on the Danube, seeking answers to their social and individual problems from various angles and geographical spaces. In *Timar's Two Worlds* Mihály Timár, the 19th-century Midas, a merchant who commutes between an island on the lower Danube and the town of Komárom, between “free” life and social constraints. In *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn*, a narrator and a traveller (the two characters are inseparable) start out following a childhood memory to travel down the Danube from the Black Forrest to the Black Sea, going through various texts, encounters and vehicles. Meanwhile, the narration maintains its attempt to define the Danube and through it, the narrator’s own life process and the regional culture and history in which he grew up.

Péter Esterházy’s text attempts to define the Danube as an experiment of self-understanding, self-definition and the reformulation of history. The river is in a sense the (lost) thread of narration, a meta-narrative of a sort, and at the same time a phenomenon which permanently changes its meaning according to how and from where it is looked at.

In Jókai’s text, the Danube acts as a divine creature, a mythical force that influences the events. This Danube is a feminine character when it is identified as Ishtar, or when it is represented as a female face, a female body and its readable or unreadable nature. Also, it is a masculine character when it builds or when it helps raising a child like a father. The river is also a building: a sanctuary, a church in which the female character coming from a different culture appears as a work of art, and a library in which the books are read by a male character through knowledge involving the language of sailors or certain myths and legends.

Although Jókai’s Danube is static compared to Esterházy’s repeatedly de- and reconstructed, metamorphosing entity appearing on various surfaces and texts but ungraspable in its entirety, it nevertheless comes across in just as many meanings, modes and facets. In both texts, the river works as a body (body of identity, surface, formation), a text (created by texts, readable as a text), and a space (cultural, geographical, physical, historical, mental). Its inevitable presence equally delineates the boundary and the path, separates and bridges textual and cultural spaces. This paper attempts to analyse the river as a textual body and textual space in the dynamics of created bodies and spaces. At first, I discuss the connections of textual and geographical space, then I move on to the reading and interpretive strategies related to the Danube and the observer positions highlighted in the text. Finally, I point out how the different cultural particularities are projected onto the body and the space.

Spaces of time, place and text / Temporal, geographic and textual spaces

“...an East or Central or kind of in-between European, on the other hand, speaks about himself, there is this thing himself, and he speaks about it, albeit through an object.” (Péter Esterházy)

„...egy afféle keleti, közép, köztes, az magamagáról beszél, van ő, és erről beszél, egy tárgyon keresztül.” (Esterházy Péter)

Before I move on to how readings of space and body are connected in concrete textual fragments, it is important to highlight the basic particularities of the two novels (textual, temporal, and constructed geographic space) in order to find their similarities. These connections derive from the literary tradition in which the two texts position themselves, the textual procedures of intertextuality and intermediality, and the basic narratorial situations.

The texts of both Mór Jókai and Péter Esterházy are representative of the Monarchy-tradition, both looking at it from different positions and contexts, as a terrain that contains partially overlapping points and lines. It is an important observation that “*the existence of a Monarchy-literature presupposes and constitutes an interpretive community*” (Gángó 2009) because this literary tradition brings together the texts of the two authors in a dialogue. One important issue tackled in the literature dealing with the literary tradition connected to this region is whether the phenomenon of the Monarchy or Central Europe can be interpreted in an integrated way. György Konrád defines the idea of Central Europe as “a flourishing diversity of the parts (...) and their awareness of this”, (Konrád 1984) in this case the parts being the neighbouring countries in Central Europe. After the regime change, several thinkers and artists have used this concept as a basic element of self-definition. Cultural diversity, the tension between the idea of nationalism and the ethnicities living on no unified territories has been a very important feature of the Monarchy.

It should be kept in mind that Jókai’s novel was published in 1872, a few years after the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867, the official establishment of the Monarchy, while *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn* appeared in 1990, after the regime change. The former was written in a newly established territorial “unit”, the latter was written right after the dissolution of such a territorial “unit”. This has its detectable effect on how the narrative constructs the geographical space and creates the human bodies in this space, for the creation or dissolution of a territorial unit induces changes that may offer new perspectives, new possibilities of self-reflection. It is this space that several work

s, among which these two novels, have tried to interpret and reconstruct retrospectively, and compare it to its previous formations.

The narrator of Jókai's text speaks from a post-compromise position when he recounts the story of Mihály Timár, the protagonist who by the end of the novel places himself outside time and society, and whose story had started in a time preceding the Monarchy.

Történetünk idejében még nem jártak a Dunán gőzhajók. Galactól elkezdve fel a Majnacsatornáig kilencezer ló járta a partokat, a hajók felvontatásával fáradva; a török Dunán a vitorlát is használták, a magyar Dunán nem. Azonkívül a csempészhajók egész raja járt-kelt akét ország közötti víz hátán, csupán izmos karú evezők által hajtatva. A sócsempészetnek volt ott divatja. (Jókai 1994)

At the time to which this history refers there were no steamers on the Danube. Between Galatz and the junction with the Main, over nine thousand horses were employed in towing ships up-stream; on the Turkish Danube sails were also used, but not on the Hungarian branch. Besides these a whole fleet of smugglers' boats traded between the two countries, propelled only by strong arms. Salt-smuggling was in full swing. (Jókai 2010)

Elmondtam neki a hazai eseményeket, hogyan lett Magyarország Ausztriával egy „és” szócska segítségével összekötve. Nagy füstfelleget fújt pipájából; a füst azt mondta: „Az én szigetem nem tartozik oda!” (Jókai 1994)

I told him what was going on in the world. I informed him that Hungary was now united to Austria by the word “and”. He blew a cloud from his pipe: the smoke said, “My island has nothing to do with that.” (Jókai 2010)

The text is unequivocal but also oversimplifying in dividing the pre-existing space into two parts, a Hungarian and a Turkish side, in order to reinforce, in this way too, the basic conflict which derives from the complicated relationship of a man and woman coming from different cultures.

The geographic area of Esterházy's novel partly overlaps with the area of Jókai's novel. However, this is a space constituted in the time of a regime change, with the Danube itself as the decisive line of separation and bridging amidst the reorganised boundaries. It is a line of separation in the sense that it is seen as a demarcation line, also in the debate or opposition of various territories' relation to the river. At the same time, it is also a bridging of different territories. The narrator and traveller moving in the space of the novel watches, follows, writes the river in an attempt to draw space and narration together in a sort of unity.

A szocialista embertípus – aki vagyok – fogta magát és elutazott egy szomszédos országba, melyet most nem neveznék néven, mindenesetre egy olyanba, amely szintén a

minap nyerte el, úgymond, a szabadságát, és még azt is dicséretére lehet felhozni, hogy ott előbb kel föl a nap, mint itt. (Esterházy 1990, 204)

The child of state socialism - which is what I am - took himself off one day to a neighbouring country, which shall for now remain unnamed. It was, at any rate, a country which had also just won its - so to speak - freedom. A country in which, to its eternal glory, the sun rises earlier than it does here. (Esterházy 1999, 216)

This space, just like Jókai's reconfiguring space after the change, struggles with the problem of not being able to become an integrated, conflict-free terrain. Even if the power relations are rearranged, the basic problems, the conceptions inherited from the previous system which lie at the basis of self-definition, still prevail. Jókai's text also lists such conflicts.

Azután megmagyaráztam neki, minő keserves tusákat küzdenek most nálunk a pártok egymással, vallás, nemzetiség, hatalomvágy mennyi keserűséget okoz. (Jókai 1994)

I described to him the bitter struggle of parties, the strife between religion, nationalities, and ambition. (Jókai 2010)

The post-compromise space of Jókai's novel is a fictive space characterised by cultural diversity. The multi-national country of Hungary is incorporated into a multi-national federation of states. Jókai creates the narratives of his literary texts with a dual concept of history, through two patterns. (Margócsy 2014) On the one hand, he tries to embed it into a unified narrative through a mythical approach, and on the other hand he himself continuously deconstructs the historical narratives of his own time which offer several views of the same age. In his novels, the dialogue between various cultures displays the tensions between interpretations of spaces and persons, the problems of strangeness and the space of strangeness. The dialogues, voices, texts show the image of the possessor culture.

Just as there are multiple cultural spaces in the texts, there are also multiple texts and media as well. The Danube is an intertext, it appears in an intertextual mode of being and reveals itself through texts. It is carried by texts, but it is itself a carrier of texts, connected thus to the issues of intermediality and intertextuality. In addition, the Danube as a factor of textual organisation – especially in Esterházy's novel – shows similarities with the mechanisms of intertextuality and intermediality. The (textual) spaces shaped and connected by it become spaces of intertextuality, intermediality and interculturality. The analysis of the texts' intertextual and intermedial relations is important for two reasons. First, the analysis of intertextual relations reveals how the Danube appears as an element in the textual space of the novel, what texts it consists of, and how that given text interacts with the other texts of the world and their interpretations. Second, the analysis may also reveal the connections of

landscape, territory and the human body, and the ways of reading the body through the geo-cultural space and the space through the cultural body.

In Jókai's case the Danube is the space of a "*library in stone*"⁶ (Jókai 2010) which is built up of various myths and legends. In this textual space the river, the water is itself a mythical element, "*the giant stream of the Old World, (Ister) the Danube*" (Jókai 2010) / "*az óvilág óriás folyama, az Ister: a Duna.*" (Jókai 1994), which fundamentally determines the shaping of the text and the story, almost like a divine principle. The river of Esterházy's text is "... *a sonnet, a mode of speech, a discourse.*" (Esterházy 1999, 15) / "*egy szonett, beszéd mód, diskurzus.*" (Esterházy 1990, 17) That is to say, a self-constructing and self-demolishing phenomenon which keeps changing its form, built up of several texts, modelling the movement and operation of the water even by the shape of the text. Both texts create the area of the Danube building on previous textual tradition.

In Jókai's case the mythical approach indicates the depths, the roots of the problems, as well as the self-reflectivity⁷ that informs late 19th-century prose. The human body, the touch of the hand is a very important motif of Midas's myth, also employed by the novel.

Esterházy uses earlier texts which employed the subject of the Danube and of travelling. An especially important referential basis of the novel is the character of Ida von Hahn-Hahn,⁸ an aristocratic female traveller who visited the East in the 19th century and wrote reports on her experiences. Her contemporary, Fanny Lewald published a parodistic text under the pseudonym Iduna Grafín H.H., entitled *Diogena*, a travesty of the elevated, overly sophisticated and overly decorated style of the author. This same instance can be seen in Esterházy's novel, making continuous references to his contemporary Claudio Magris's book *Danube*, as to an author who writes the history of the states situated along the Danube from an outside view – so to say, as an "Italian uncle". Both novels place the functioning of seeing, touching, that is, perception amidst the conflicts of cultural and social spaces.

The narrative situation in *Timar's Two Worlds*, similarly to Esterházy's text, starts from a childhood memory. The reader finds out in the last chapter that the narratorial voice is

⁶ "It is a library in stone, the names of the rocks are the lettered back of the volumes, and he who knows how to open them may read a romance therein. Michael Timar had long been at home in this library." (Jókai. 2010. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31409/31409-h/31409-h.htm>)

⁷ The conception of literary work as constructed text develops at the turn of the century in the self-reflection of literature, which is present in the myths, tales, sagas and legends built into the text. By literary self-reflection I mean that at the end of the 19th century literary language, its reception possibilities, its constructing and its mode of being became more and more important.

⁸ It may be an interesting connection in terms of the analysis that Ida von Hahn-Hahn was Jókai's contemporary, and her influence on Jókai can be observed in the fictitious literary quote as well.

actually not an omniscient point of view, but it is a piece written at request, a fiction containing elements of memory.

Negyven év múlt el azóta, hogy Timár eltűnt Komáromból. Ábécetanuló gyermek voltam akkor, mikor annak a gazdag úrnak a temetésére kirukkoltattak bennünket, akiről később azt beszéltek, hogy talán nem is halt meg, csak elbujdosott; a nép azt hitte erősen, hogy Timár még él, és valamikor ismét elő fog jönni. Talán Athalie-nak a fenyegető szavai költötték ezt a hitet. A közvélemény ragaszkodott hozzá. (Jókai 1994)

Since Timar's disappearance from Komorn forty years had passed. I was in the alphabet-class when we schoolboys went to the funeral of the rich lord, of whom people said afterward he was perhaps not dead, only disappeared. Among the people the belief was strong that Timar lived, and would some day reappear; possibly Athalie's words had set this idea afloat—at any rate, public opinion was strongly in favor of it. (Jókai 2010)

In Esterházy's novel, the text starts with a childhood family memory. The metaphor of the river appears already in this beginning part, together with the genealogical tree which shows to the reader that the river is an important element for all levels of the interpretive system.

Volt nekem egy távoli, fantasztikus és titokzatos nagybátyám, akit mindenki csak Robertónak hívott, mintha olasz selyemfű lett volna, kivéve apámat, ő nem hívta sehogy, „nevét nem vette ajkára”. Nem vér szerinti rokon, egy nagynéniszerűség férjeként lett rövid ideig családtag, anyai ágon, mégpedig épp ott, ahol ez az ág játékosan és sorsszerűen érintette az apai ágot – egy a folyó, akárhány ága-boga van is. (Esterházy 1990, 1)

I once had this mysterious, distant uncle, whom everyone simply called Roberto, as if he were some Italian gigolo. Everyone, that is, except my father, who didn't call him anything at all: the man's name 'never so much as passed his lips'. He wasn't a blood relation. It was as the husband of a kind of aunt that he briefly became part of the family, joining it at precisely the point where the two sides, maternal and paternal, playfully and fatefully joined hands. A river is always the same river, however many arms it has. (Esterházy 1999, 1)

In the first chapters there begins a travel, which narrates in parallel a memory, a one-time travel on the Danube, and the reliving of that memory in the present. By the continuous change of perspective and the first and second person, the reader is maintained in a state of confusion as to whether the character of the traveller and the narrator are identical. There are permanent references that the novel displays the self-reflective process of text creation, and this creative process is the actual subject and the river is the shape, operation and thread of this stream of consciousness.

[K]italálom én a Duna-deltát. (Esterházy 1990, 203)

I'll intent the Danube Delta for myself... (Esterházy 1999, 215)

Jókai employs a similar turn in the closure of the novel, when it is revealed that the narrator is actually a writer who unfolds the story from end to beginning, putting the reader in fact into a stream of text closing up on itself.

Mondtam neki, hogy regényíró vagyok... Az egy olyan ember, aki egy történetnek a végéből ki tudja találni annak a történetnek az egész összességét. (Jókai 1994)

I told him I was a romance-writer... One who can guess by the end of a story what the whole story was from the beginning. (Jókai 2010)

Both narratives are constructed in a subjective net of memories, the decisive element of which is the Danube. Just as for Esterházy “... *and the way a whole life can be determined by the water, the river...*” (Esterházy 1999. 196) „*egy életet teljes egészében meghatároz a víz, a folyó...*” (Esterházy 1990, 185), in the memories of Jókai’s narrator, “*The Danube was at that time a powerful master, and uprooted forests in its rage; a mortal venturing on its surface was like a worm floating on a straw, and yet this worm defied it.*” (Jókai 2010) „*[a] Duna rettenetes úr (...), ki haragjában erdőket szaggatott ki gyökereikből; a hátára szállott ember csak egy féreg, mely egy szalmaszálon úszik. Hanem ez a féreg dacolt vele.*” (Jókai 1994) This river delineates a territory, behaves like a human body, and in both cases it is built up of texts and itself builds texts with its presence.

Reading strategies

From the strong connection of the textual spaces presented above, I will now turn to the interpretive attempts used by the protagonists to observe the surrounding territory. The interpretive attempts of the observers (travellers, narrators) involving the river and the human bodies inform the body- and space-concepts of the texts. The basis of these concepts is that “narratives do not only unfold in space and time, but also construct a certain perspective of space and time”, for “just like the ordinary perception of space and time, the narrative space and the narrative time are also results of construction”. (Füzi-Török 2006) Based on Jonathan Crary’s *Techniques of the Observer*, the observer can be defined as “one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations.” (Crary 1999); in addition, these are travellers, observers who see their environment through permanently changing spaces. It is this change that reflects the duality of both texts in that it shapes its familiar and unfamiliar concepts along certain barriers and

mirror positions. These barriers appear in the cultural differences represented by characters, the wounds on the body, in travelling on the river, and they articulate time and space; the mirrors are surfaces, such as real mirrors or the face of a character, the surface of water, in which the individual experiences itself through differences and similarities. Consequently, Michael Harbsmeier's attempt to examine travelogues as sources of the history of mentalities can also be valid for these texts. He claims that the duality of the collective differentiation appearing in the concepts of *we* and *others* becomes more general in the economy of images and notions in the description of foreign cultures and societies. (Harbsmeier 2006) The two texts are also worth reading while having in mind these two definitions. The narrative designates certain observers, interpreters, who understand the world via a certain language, a certain medium and a certain (geo)cultural, historical, social and economic perspective, and define themselves against others within this understanding.

As I have mentioned before, in Jókai's case the Danube is a "library" in which the traveller, the merchant Mihály Timár, appears as the reader. He understands the space, the history of the river via the myths and legends of the sailors. The following example shows the merger of these two textual spaces:

Mint tapasztalt vadász és vízjáró hamar rátalált a törésre, amin keresztül a nádasba lehet hatolni, s ott azután a vízi növényzet megmondta neki mindig, hogy hol jár. Ahol a víz színén a nagy nymfėja-levelek libegnek zöldesfehér teljes tulipánvirágaikkal, ott mély víz van, ott a talajt növénytörmelékkel hordja meg a víz sodroma (...) Ha a csónakos útmutató növényeit nem érti, úgy belebódulhat a nádberekbe, hogy egész nap sem talál ki belőle. (Jókai 1994)

Being an experienced marsh-sportsman, he soon found the one opening in the reeds through which it was possible to penetrate, and recognized by the vegetation the depth of the channel. Where the great leaves and snowy cups of the water-lily float on the surface, there is deep water which scours the weeds and mud away (...) The boatman who does not know these vegetable guides might lose himself in the reed-beds, and not get out all day. (Jókai 2010)

Timár's interpretation is based on the familiarity with the language of the sailors, the knowledge of their myths and legends. His interpretation is conveyed to us by the narrator, who appears not to be an omniscient figure, for he passes on the legend of Timár's life. Timár's reading rests on two important pillars: one is the interpretation of the elements and signs of a landscape familiar because of being repeatedly walked through, and the other is the textual world he has become familiar with through the culturally embedded myths, tales, legends of various places. This is how Mihály's Danube is constructed in his mind almost like

a virtual library. It is by this reading experience closely related to the river that he tries to understand people and the surrounding world.

In Esterházy's case, one can speak of a dense network of texts incorporated into the novel. At the end of the book, there is a list of works (an index) the narrator constantly refers to. The text complex is built up of various embedded fragments and references to texts about the region, while itself plays with the shape and behaviour of the Danube. This creates a situation in which the novel becomes identical with the river, while the river is construed as a dense network of texts.

A Duna az nem valami, nem a vize, nem a vízmolekulái, nem a veszedelmes mederviszonyok, a Duna az egész, a Duna a forma. A forma, az nem köntös, mely alatt megbúvik valami nálánál fontosabb és szeriőzebb. (Esterházy 1990, 25)

The Danube is not something, not the water, not the molecules, not the dangerous currents, but the totality: the Danube is the form. The form is not some mantle beneath which something still more important and serious lies hidden. (Esterházy 1999, 24)

The bodies are construed similarly to the river. At Jókai, one sees a complex, corporeal female figure positioned in the sacred space of the Danube.⁹ From a feminist critical perspective, the female body appears as a work or art, an object of observation.

Igaz, hogy még gyermek, alig több tizenhárom évesnél; de magas, nyúlánk alak és komoly, szoborszerű arc, tökéletes antik vonásokkal, mintha anyja a milói Venus arcán feledte volna szemeit valaha. Sűrű, fekete haja valami érces fénnel bír, minő a fekete hattyú tolla. De szemei sötétkékek. Két hosszú, vékonyan rajzolt szemöldök csaknem összeér homlokán; az ilyen összeérő szemöldök valami varázshatalmat kölcsönöznek az arcnak. Ez a két vékony szemöldök együtt mintha valami fekete aureole volna egy szentkép homlokán. (Jókai 1994)

She is certainly only a child, hardly more than thirteen; but her figure is tall and slender, her face calm as if hewn out of alabaster, with severely antique lines, as if her mother had looked always at the Venus of Milo. Her thick black hair has a metallic gleam like the plumage of the black swan; but her eyes are dark-blue. The long delicate eyebrows almost meet over the brow, which gives her face a curious charm; it is as if these arching brows formed a black aureole round the brow of a saint. (Jókai 2010)

⁹ "The Iron Gate has a history of two thousand years. Four nations—Romans, Turks, Roumanians and Hungarians, have each in turn given it a different name. We seem to approach a temple built by giants, with rocky pillars, towering columns, and wonderful colossi on its lofty frieze, stretching out in a perspective of four miles, and, as it winds, discovering new domes with other groups of natural masonry, and other wondrous forms." (Jókai 2010) / „A Vaskapunak kétezer éves históriája van, s négy nemzet nyelvén nevezik azt. Mintha egy templom közelednék felénk, melyet óriások építettek, pillérekkel, melyek kőszá- lak, és oszlopokkal, melyek toronymagasak, csodálatos kolossz-alakokat emelve a felmagasló párkányokra, mikben a képzelem szentek szobrai- t látja, s e templom csarnoka négy mért földnyi távolba mélyed, fordul, kanyarodik, új templomot mutat, más falcsoportokkal, más csodaalakokkal.” (Jókai 1994)

This female figure shows similarities on several points with the rocky church-like area around the Iron Gate, and with certain states of the river. In one episode, Timár gets lost on the frozen river, on the very surface of the water, because he cannot read the unfamiliar terrain. Like in Midas's myth, the matter around him becomes stiff, unusable, unreadable. The reading of the female body coming from the Turkish culture, and the frozen Danube which covers up its signs well known for a sailor, shows many similarities.

Az volt az utolsó reménysége, hogy majd ha megvirrad, akkor csak megtudja a napról, hogy merre van kelet. Arról azután hajós létére majd tájékoztatja magát, hogy merre van a Duna folyása. Ha valahol léket talált volna a jégen, akkor a víz folyásáról is megtudhatta volna, merre menjen; de a jégkéreg szilárd volt mindenütt, s áttörni fejsze nélkül nem lehetett. Meg is virradt, legalább világos kezdett lenni, de a sűrű ködön át napot nem lehetett látni. Menni pedig kellett, mert a pihenés a jégen veszedelmes. Kilenc óra is elmúlt; még mindig nem talált partot. Akkor egy pillanatra ritkulni kezdett a köd; a nap fénytányérja láthatóvá lett, mint egy fehér, fénytelen arc az égen, mint a nap árnyéka. A lég mintha számtalan ragyogó jégtűkkel volna tele, amik szikrázva gomolyognak össze egy szemvakító homállyá. (Jókai 1994)

His only hope was, that when day at last dawned he would be able to guess by the sun where the east lay, and then, as an old sailor, could ascertain his position. If he had come across a hole in the ice, the current of the water would have shown him in what direction to go; but the surface was entirely covered, and without an axe it was impossible to make a hole. At last it began to dawn, but the fog hid the sun. Nine o'clock, and he had not yet found the shore, though the fog seemed to grow less and the sun's disk was visible, like a pale, colorless ball (face), a mere shadow of its glorious self. The air was full of countless glittering particles of ice, which melted into a dazzling vapor. (Jókai 2010)

Just as on the frozen Danube, he gets lost too in his attempts to explore Timea's face. In vain does he try to read the girl through his knowledge of the sailor's language, of natural phenomena; just as he was left clueless on the "transformed", stiffened Danube, he is now unable to understand his wife, who carries within herself the customs and culture of the East.

Female figures who show similarities with the behaviour of the Danube exist in Esterházy's novel as well. Such parallels can be drawn between Dalma, the woman/women always called by different pseudonyms – usually names of women travellers – and the river.

Állandóan változott az arca, nagyvilági nőből egy kislány majd egy szigorú alkalmazott, minden mindig változott rajta, még a teste is, olykor az is elszigorodott, máskor megvonaglott vagy háttérbe szorult, szorította magát, csak a szeme maradt állandó,

rejtélyes ékkő, felemás macskanézés, tigristekintet. Még soha nem néztem meg ennyire egy nőt. Nem gondoltam, hogy valaki ilyen sok. (Esterházy 1990, 21)

Her face changed continually: from the woman of the world to a little girl, then an austere employee. Everything about her kept changing, even her body, which at time also become austere, then at other times simply twitched or receded into the background. Only her eyes remained perpetually the same. Two enigmatic precious stones, strange cat's eyes with a certain tigerish gaze. I have never look so closely a woman before. I have never thought that there could be so much of anyone to look at. (Esterházy 1999, 20)

Like the river, the other person is also constructed in a complex manner. In this text as well, the reading of human bodies is closely connected to how a traveller explores a region. Here we see bodies whose physical existence is penetrated by that historical, geographical, cultural and textual space in which they exist.¹⁰ Such is Roberto, who imagines himself to be the Danube,¹¹ or an aunt living in Austria whose body reflects or evokes the Monarchy.¹² At the same time, the narrator is permanently at pains to grasp or piece together the space as a body based on previous cultural knowledge, as seen for instance on 16th century maps representing *Europa regina*.¹³ In this sense we get a fragmented body, a territory fallen apart and incapable of cooperation, and a permanently metamorphosing Danube.

Perspectives, the space and the observer

“What constitutes the Danube is for me to decide.”

¹⁰ “She became famous for living strictly according to the European clock (her body too).” (Esterházy 1999, 225) / „Avval vált ismertté, hogy aggályosan betartotta és őrizte az európai időt, egyszerűen aszerint élt (a teste is).” (Esterházy 1990, 213)

¹¹ “So Roberto is the Danube. That’s his game. He imagines that he is the Danube, concretely, that this bit is Passau, that is Eschingen, and every night he takes her wrist and leads her hand over his body.” (Esterházy. 1999, 224) / „Tehát, hogy Roberto a Duna, ez a heppje, ezt képzei magáról, hogy ő a Duna, de konkrétan, tehát, hogy ez Passau, amaz Eschingen, és minden éjszaka végig kellett az asszonynak mutogatnia a Dunát, Roberto fogja a csuklóját, és vezeti a kezét” (Esterházy 1990, 211)

¹² “Nelly herself resembled the Empire so far as she too was made up of diverse, internally contradictory elements: she was a large, hefty woman, as big as a wardrobe, but had small, fine hands with a light silken touch, and bushy, almost manly eyebrows which leaped up and down like brush, or like a pair of misplaced moustaches, spruce moustaches...” (Esterházy 1999, 7–8) / „Nellyke maga is hasonlított a Monarchiához, amennyiben különböző, egymásnak ellentmondó részekből volt összerakva: nagy debella asszony, egy szekrény, akkora, viszont kicsi, finom keze könnyű, selymes tapintású, dús, szinte férfias szemöldöke, akár egy pamacs föl-le ugrál, olyan, mint egy, illetve kettő bajusz.” (Esterházy 1990, 10)

¹³ “If Prague is the heart of Central Europe, says György Konrád, Budapest is its crotch. Okay, that’s fine, heart, crotch, there’s not a lot to lose here. But the way the breasts and buttocks sing or caterwaul, dance or shrivel, is not a matter of indifference. Show me the town that would accept such an idea with its head (breasts, etc.) held high? Central Europe’s ankle? Zagreb as Central Europe’s nipple? Vienna as its earlobe? And how about the whole woman? What is she like? Well? Well she’s fond of her homeland and has lovely earlobes.” (Esterházy. 1999, 132) / „Ha Prága Közép-Európa szíve, mondja Konrád György, akkor Budapest az öle. Rendben, ez jó, szív, öl, itt sokat nem lehet veszíteni. De már a mellek, a segg, hogyan zeng vagy kornyikál, táncol vagy kókad, nem mindegy. Mely város, ki ilyesmit emelt fővel (kebellet stb.) elvállalna? Közép-Európabokája? Zágráb, mint Közép-Európa csecse? Bécs meg a fülcimpája. És milyen a nő? Milyen, milyen?! Hát szereti a hazáját és szép a fülcimpája.” (Esterházy 1990, 125–126)

(Péter Esterházy)

„Hogy mi a Duna, azt én mondom meg.”

(Esterházy Péter)

Both texts put forward two basic positions of observation: one is peeping, observation, the other is the moment of border crossing. These are perspectives which offer a more reflected glance on the relationship of the *we* and the *other*. Laura Mulvey calls on the theory of psychoanalysis in her study *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Mulvey 1999), presenting how the unconscious of the patriarchal society¹⁴ influences the film's mechanism of giving pleasure, its language built on seeing, and how this structures ways of seeing and pleasure in looking. In the culture she examines, the woman "...stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of a woman still tied to her place as the bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning."¹⁵ The positions of the observer, the peeping and border crossing can be easily related to Mulvey's analysis, for peeping eliminates the onlooker from the circle of active characters similarly to the observer in cinema, and border crossing is a kind of relation in which our image of the other leads us to ourselves. Connecting this to Crary's view that "Vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product and the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification." (Crary 1999) I analyse these situations by looking at the media and practices through which they appear.

Peeping

In Esterházy's case, the problem of seeing appears in several forms, connected to how, through what means the observer contemplates the surrounding world. His method is sometimes similar to an agent's observation, reminiscent of power practices before the regime change. The element, instrument and object of observation is the Danube.

Őt is a Dunáról kérdezgettem, mondjon bármit. (Esterházy 1990, 187)

I asked about the Danube – 'Say whatever comes to mind.' (Esterházy 1999, 199)

¹⁴ Mulvey emphasises the dual role of women in this, being a symbol of the danger of castration, and at the same time the will to fill the lack formed on his body.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Peeping, so we are told, is a learned behaviour which the individual acquires in a certain period, and can no longer observe the world in the lack of it.

Ez a szocialista embertípus sok mindent gondolt magáról – nem sokat, hanem sokfélét –, de az álmában se jutott volna eszébe, hogy ő szocialista embertípus. Nem okvetlenül mondta magát szabadnak, óvatos duhaj volt, de azért végül is, valljuk be őszintén, azt gondolta, hogy nem fertőzte őt meg ez a rendszer, az a rendszer, amelyik már nincs is. Megvolt mindennek az ára, megfizette, kész, passz. És nagyon örült, hogy ez az egész így szépen összedőlt, fölszabadulásnak érezte, minthogy nagyon sok ereje fölszabadult, minthogy már nem kell folyamatosan résen lennie, vagy csak annyira, amennyire ez természetes. (Esterházy 1990, 205)

This child of state socialism thought a great deal about himself – or rather, not so much a great deal, as many different things – but never in his dreams would he have imagined that he was a child of state socialism. Not that he thought himself free; he was far too cautious for that. But – we are bound finally to admit – he did think that he had not been corrupted by the system (the system which no longer exists). Everything had its price, and this he had duly paid. And that, he thought, was that. He was very pleased when the whole thing fell to pieces, seeing it as a kind of liberation. A liberation of energy, above all, for he no longer had to be perpetually on the alert. Or at least no more than was natural. (Esterházy 1999, 216)

The text parallels this observer with the novel's reader-observer, who participates in the reading process in a similar manner, in a sense as an outsider. However, Esterházy's text does not only mean to confuse the reader by these constant character changes, but permanently reflects on the narrative situation, the observer's position, and dismantles seeing itself, disassembles the field of vision by never creating a unified interpretive perspective from where the world looks graspable in its entirety.

Jókai's novel also contains two important places from where the protagonist may become the observer of his own and others' lives. One is a secret place behind a picture, which is in itself a complex symbolic system. In a visually complex situation, the peeper himself, Timár, becomes part of a painting (dragon) that the reader "sees" mediated by the narrative.

Timár, midőn így látta őt, csüggedten üté homlokát öklével, s elfordítá arcát a Júdás-lyuktól, melyen leskelődött. [...] Hát az a másik férfi ott a Szent György-kép háta mögött, hát az nem érezte-e magát úgy, mint az a sárkány, melynek az arkangyal dárdáját torkába verve tartja? (Jókai 1994)

When Timar saw her so, he struck his forehead with his fist, and turned his face from the Judas-hole through which he had been looking. For the next few moments he saw and heard no more. [...] And that other man behind the picture of St. George – must he not feel like the dragon when the knight thrust his spear into him? (Jókai 2010)

The other distant observer position is the No Man's Island on the Danube,¹⁶ a hiding place from which the text points at Timár's own life as well as the entire society. In relation to Jókai's character representation, István Margócsy mentions that "the viewpoints of the narrator and the protagonist are much closer to each other than in the other novels." (Margócsy 2013) In Jókai's text Timár finds himself in a similar position with the narrator, who creates the events from outside the narrated world. The novel presents permanently changing spectator positions by the use of mirrors, reflections, portraits appearing on paintings and other media, and by this it can be connected to the period's theories on subjective seeing: in the late 19th century, objective seeing was considered graspable by individual particularities, the differences of the observers' interpretations.

Border Crossing

The moment of border crossing is closely linked with the peeping, the voyeuristic observer's status. The border makes the personal and the uncanny space visible as a mirror, as a breakage. Esterházy's sentence reads: "*Elsewhere is a negative mirror. The traveller recognizes the little that is his, discovering the much he has not had and never will have.*" (Esterházy 1990, 147) „*A távol nem más, mint negatív tükör. Az utazó felismeri azt a keveset, ami a sajátja, miközben felfedezi azt a sok mindent, amit nem ért el, és nem ér el soha.*” (Esterházy 1990, 150) The questions related to the setup, the structure of the space cohere in terms of the notions of *the other*, *the stranger* and *unity*, which are hard to interpret in both texts. In Jókai's novel this manifests especially in Timár's attitude towards Timea, a woman of Turkish origin, while he is shown as the representative of European culture also in search of his identity. In Esterházy's novel it manifests through the traveller-narrator's questions related to space, neighbours and women.

The different countries call for particular interpretation, the observers living on a given territory understand the world differently than those living in other countries. It is this

16 "In many places it has already mastered the obstacles which barred its way, and flows foaming through the open breach. There, it has burrowed beneath the wall of the ravine, and by its continuous current has washed out a channel below the overhanging rock. Here, it has carved islands out of the stubborn granite, new creations, to be found on no chart, overgrown with wild bushes. They belong to no state—neither Hungary, Turkey, nor Serbia; they are ownerless, nameless, subject to no tribute, outside the world. And there again it has carried away an island, with all its shrubs, trees, huts, and wiped it from the map." (Jókai, 2010) / „Néhol szigeteket rakott le a legyőzhetetlen sziklák mögé, új földalkotásokat, mik semmi régi térképen nincsenek; azokat benőtte vad fa és bokor, azok nem tartoznak semmi államhoz, sem magyarhoz, törökhöz, sem szerbhez; a senki országa az, adót nem fizető, urat nem ismerő, világon kívül eső, meg nem nevezett föld! Másunnan meg elhordta a kikezdett szigetet bokraival, erdőivel, kunyhóival együtt, s letörülte alakjaikat a térképről.” (Jókai 1994); "...the Danube built it up for no one." (Jókai 2010) / „A Duna építette – senkinek.” (Jókai 1994)

difference that the traveller on the Danube experiences (who meanwhile also experiences his own strangeness).

Vagy túlstilizálom a „keleti-utazás” okozta szorongást? Reise-Fieber volna csak? Lehet. (Esterházy 1990, 189)

Or am I ver-stylizing the anxiety of 'going East'? – Nothing more than a bit Reisefieber? Maybe. (Esterházy 1999, 201)

The text, playing with the use of “*eastern-journey*” and *Reise-Fieber* terms shows how the traveller distances himself linguistically from the territory he is approaching by using a German term and the attribute *Eastern* to describe the journey’s nature. Using a phrase of a more western language area and the term *Eastern*, he places himself outside the zone.

De azért itt tényleg más világ kezdődik. Más az igen, más a nem, más a soha, más az örökké, más a végtelen, azaz más a geometria; más a becsület, az adott szó, a bosszú, mást értenek jogon és kötelességen: egy szó mint száz: utazom néhány száz kilométert, és egy egészen más értelmezésével fogok találkozni – Arisztotelésznek. (A szórendet beáldoztuk a szerény csattanóért.) (Majd látni fogom, hogy ez a másság nem ilyen. Egyszerűbb. Szótalanabb, szó nélküli. – Utólagos bejegyzés.) (Esterházy 1990, 189)

But then we really are entering another world. A different ‘yes’, a different ‘no’, a different never, a different forever, a different eternity – that is, a different geometry; a different sense of honour, of giving one’s word, of evenge, a different understanding of right and obligation. Or, to cut a long story short: I am travelling a few hundred of kilometers and I’m going to meet a completely different interpretation of – Aristotle. (Here syntax has been sacrificed to enhance the humble punchline.) (I shall soon see that the difference is not quite like that. It is more simple. More wordless, without words. – Note added later.) (Esterházy 1999, 201)

The traveller senses the space of strangeness differently, through his previous experience, which can be grasped especially in language, in readability. He has no language for the country he enters, so he draws his reading on previous textual knowledge.

Próbálok olvasni. Jonathan Harker (Bram Stoker: Drakula gróf válogatott rémtettei) megerősít abban, hogy elkezdődik a Kelet. Útitársaim szemfogát vizsgálom. A házaspár férfitagja jóindulatúan oktatgat. Hogy inkább németül, mint magyarul szólítsak meg ismeretlent. „Bajos lehet.” De már Ó-Romániában vagy a Duna-delta környékén nyugodtan beszélhetek magyarul, az ott már nem jelent semmit. Semmit. Nem ijesztgetni akar, hanem segíteni. „Nem tanácsos.” (Esterházy 1990, 197)

[E]lőjött minden kiszolgáltatottsága, minden ijedelme, gátlása, minden, amit mégiscsak megörökölt a rendszertől, ő, a szocialista embertípus. (Esterházy 1990, 209)

I'm trying to read. Jonathan Harker (Bram Stoker: Selected Atrocities of Count Dracula) confirms my suspicion that we are now entering the East. I check the upper canines of my fellow-travellers. The male party of a married couple well-intentionedly suggests that I'd be better off addressing strangers in German rather than in Hungarian. 'Could be dicey.' But in Old Rumania, or in the region of the Danube Delta, I can, by all means, speak Hungarian. There it signifies nothing. Nothing. He wasn't trying to alarm me, only being helpful. "Not a good idea." (Esterházy 1999, 197)

And it was now that his defencelessness and subservience, his anxieties and inhibitions really made themselves felt, as qualities which he, the child of state socialism, had inherited from the system after all. (Esterházy 1999, 197)

These fears are hereditary, they were transmitted not only by a past system, but by a whole textual world as well. Reading Dracula's figure into the landscape points to the reader, to the reading process through the identification opportunities given by the textual world. The dialogue carried on the train about the working processes of meaning shows the demise of an interpreting attitude similar to the pattern of the manner of observation. This kind of inheritance of fear is compensated with the relativity of sensations experienced in the waiting room, where space changes through knowledge.

Elsőre a váróterem is hatalmasnak tetszik, gigantikus, de ahogy kiismerem lassan, úgy zsugorodik. (Esterházy 1990, 198)

At first glance even the waiting-room seems immense, but shrinks the more I begin to find my way around. (Esterházy 1999, 210)

The borderline is very pronounced in Jókai's novel. The division of space shows not only in the name of the territory and the Eastern–Western opposition, but through the notions of health-sickness and the description of the landscape as well.

Alant aztán hegy, völgy, erdő és falu mind az ég tűzfényével volt kifestve: e kínzó ragyogvánnyal, mely árnyékot nem vet; középett a Duna, mint a lángoló Phlegeton, s annak a közepén egy sziget tornyokkal és nagy, tömör épületekkel, mik mind úgy izzanak, mintha csupa egyetlen olvasztókemencét képeznének, amin keresztül kell menni, mint a purgatóriumon, minden emberi teremtnak, aki a dögvészes keletről a tiszta nyugat határvonalán átlép. (Jókai 1994)

There the evening clouds were piled like an avalanche, in all shades of fiery and blood red, and if the glowing mist-veil parted through the rent, the sky was not blue but emerald-green. Below, mountain and valley, forest and field, gleamed in the sunset reflex with radiance which hurt the eye, unable to find a shady point of rest. The Danube rushing on beneath, like a fiery Phlegethon, and in its midst an island with towers and massive buildings, all glowing as if part of a huge furnace, through which

every creature, coming from the pestilential east to the frontier of the healthy west, must pass as through purgatory. (Jókai 2010)

Crossing the border is linked with an investigation process where touch receives the central role.

Mivelhogy semmiről sem ragad el olyan könnyen a keleti pestis, mint az ércpénzről, annál fogva azt a keletről érkező hajósnak elébb bele kell tenni a vízzel telt korsóba, s a nyugati tisztaság őre onnan veszi azt ki már megtisztultan, éppen úgy, ahogy a Szkelánál szükséges minden adott pénzt a vízmedencéből kihalászni. (Jókai 1994)

As the oriental plague is more easily communicated by coins than by anything else, the sailors coming from the Levant must throw the money into a jug of water, in order that the western health-officer may take it out cleansed: just as at the Szkela every one must fish the money he receives out of a basin. (Jókai 2010)

The explanation for Timár's problem, for whom wealth causes all conflicts in all human relationships, can be found in the overlapping notions of money, sickness and touch. This is the age of the pioneers of microbiology, when touch, contact and the problem of germs spreading this way becomes important.

Mert minden idegen néppel való érintkezésünk valami új, eddig ismeretlen ragállyal ajándékozott meg bennünket. Kínától kaptuk a vörhenyt, a szaracénoktól a himlőt, az oroszoktól a grippét, a dél-amerikaiaktól a sárgalázt, s a kelet-indusoktól a kolerát - a törököktől pedig a pestist. (Jókai 1994)

For each contact with a new people has endowed us with a new disease. From China we received scarlet fever, from the Saracens small-pox, from Russia influenza, from South America yellow fever, and from the Hindoos cholera. But the plague comes from Turkey. (Jókai 2010)

This idea can be well paralleled with Timár's touch, who, after getting in contact with money, is incapable of managing human relationships, and keeps indirectly wounding others. Susan Sontag discusses the metaphorical meaning of illness in her study, *Illness as Metaphor*. (Sontag 1997) In the light of Sontag's text, Timár's illness is the metaphor of a social problem that threatens people living in good economic conditions, people touching matter.

The initial description of the ship arriving with a Turkish girl on the mighty river Ister, the Danube, gives the impression that the river breaks through from the East, straight from under the ground, from the cradle of myth's origin, from the subconscious. The text sometimes shifts from the description of Timár's perspective to show the point of view of Timea's presumed culture.

Timéa le nem vette a szemeit e látványról, míg a hajó el nem haladt előtte, s a bércek megint összecsukódtak a szép táj fölött, s ismét az alpesek árnya takarta be a mély szakadékok. - Úgy képzelem - szólt Timéa a biztoshoz -, mintha egy hosszú-hosszú börtönfolyosón keresztül mennénk be egy országba, amelyből nem lehet visszajönni többé. (Jókai 1994)

Timéa never turned her gaze from this spectacle until the ship had passed, and the mountains had closed over the exquisite scene, hiding the deep chasm in their shadows. "I feel," she said, "as if we were going through a long, long prison, into a land from which there is no return." (Jókai 2010)

The landscape becomes dynamic through the journey on water in this scene. The mountains close like a prison gate in the glance of the woman's eye, foreshadowing her observer fate. The prison is presented later by the narrator as the custom-system and culture the woman functions in,¹⁷ that does not let her think freely about herself in the European space, ultimately leading to total devastation.

The images of a "clean" West and the West as prison function simultaneously in the text. The reader advances along two different cultural perspectives, picturing the main source of tension, of conflict, which emerges in the characters' relation to each other. The text strives to unfold the functioning of the woman's glance as well. At the same time, a closer analysis of the text shows that it reflects the narrator's point of view.

We can see a "hard" border crossing road and a related journey full with ordeals in both texts. The two travellers experience something very similar on the Lower Danube's almost exactly same spot. In Esterházy's text the moment of sluicing is metaphorically linked with the historical moment of regime change.

Megkezdtük az átzsilipelést, leengedték a vizet, nyolcemeletes lucskos kamrafal tornyosodott fölénk, aknában éreztük magunkat, a zsilip ellentétes kapuzata lassan kitárult, a besütő nap átmelegítette a kriptahangulatot. Ami azonban ekkor történt, azt nem kívánom az ellenségemnek sem. A szűk zsilipkamra vizét úgy megtekerte a szovjet Diesel hirtelen elindított, asztal nagyságú csigája, hogy elsüllyedtünk. A távolodó szovjet hajó parancsnoka, Majakovszkij, udvariasan sajnálkozó mozdulattal intett hátra: a hidrodinamika törvényeivel szemben ő is tehetetlen, elvtársak, ne lőjete! (Esterházy 1990, 215)

The sluicing commenced. As they let out the water, a wet and dirty eight-storey wall towered up before us. It felt like being in a mine shaft, the sluice gates slowly pulling

¹⁷ "Here a great difficulty arose. The Mohammedan religion has nothing to say to women in its dogmas. To a Moslem a woman is no more than a flower which fades and falls, whose soul is its fragrance, which the wind carries away, and it is gone. Timéa had no creed." (Jókai 2010) / „A mohamedán nők nem tagjai az eklézsiának; jelen sem szabad lenniök a férfiak istentiszteletén (...) Ettől a nőknek mind nincs miért félni, de viszont nem is jutnak el a paradicsomba a nagy Tubafa árnyéka alá, mert ott a férfiaknak örájuk semmi szükségük nincs: azokra ott az örök ifjúságú „hurik” várnak, minden férfira hetvenhét. A mohamedán nő semmi sem, csak egy virág, lehull és elmúlik, lelke virágillat, elfújja a szél, és nincs többé.” (Jókai 1994)

apart and the sun warming the crypt-like air. What happened next, however, I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. The massive diesel-powered propeller of the Soviet ship suddenly began to turn, churning up the water in the tight sluice chamber so violently that we went under. As the Soviet ship sailed off into the distance its captain, Mayakovsky, politely waved back at us, full of regret before the laws of hydrodynamics even he was powerless, comrades, don't shoot! And that is the authentic story. (Esterházy 1999, 227)

The chamber wall, the crypt-like atmosphere, the receding Soviet Diesel and the sinking all hint to a difficult change taking place. In Jókai's text border crossing indicates a similar turn.

Csak az történt, hogy a hajó szerencsésen áthaladt a puszkás sziklák öblén is, s készült a román csatornába befutni, hanem az öböl medencéjéből, kivált nagy szél mellett, a csatornába oly sebesen ömlik át a hullám, hogy valódi zuhatagot képez, s itt a salto mortale leghalálosabb pillanata. (Jókai 1994)

It was only that the ship had passed safely through the "gun-rocks", and was about to enter the Roumanian channel; but from the little bay the water rushes so furiously into the canal that a regular water-fall is formed, and this is the dangerous moment of the "Leap". (Jókai 2010)

The dip into the water, death, the moments of death's proximity and resuscitation are linked to both crossings. Both descriptions are symbolic, both emphasise a change that starts a self analyzing process. Border crossing is linked to a turn that makes the interpreters question their own limits.

Projection Surfaces

"Michael frowned, and possibly Athalie understood him."
(Mór Jókai)

„Mihály összeráncolta e szóra a homlokát, s Athalie talán olvasni tudott e homlokredőkből."
(Jókai Mór)

"A face, too, is a landscape."
(Péter Esterházy)
„Az arc is táj."
(Esterházy Péter)

The environment, the landscape is closely connected with "the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world." (Mulvey 1999) The surfaces of the human body and the surfaces of the Danube, of nature often get closely linked. The various texts, signs, portraits, body parts that

can be understood as projections of inner interpretations and feelings appear on surfaces like matter, physical spaces. The description of the man and the body is helped by the textual formation of the Danube. We see man through the Danube, respectively the Danube and the connected area is mapped on the body, it is drawn on it or appears inside of it.

As I've shown with previous examples, in Esterházy's text the surfaces of the body work similarly to geographical spaces, and the other way around too. Time is influenced by different historical and cultural spaces (Monarchy, European time zone). The body is shown as a geographical space, and space accordingly takes the shape of human body, body parts, or, at least, the observer is trying to see it as such. Thus, we get complex surfaces where we can analyse the line and the imprints of the Danube in contrast with each other.

In Jókai's novel human bodies get in contact with matter and media that can be found in nature and in the parallel sacred spaces. The structure of the Danube's "body" and the description of its material being is worth knowing and analysing in comparison with the foreign, Eastern woman's body.

At the beginning of the novel we can read about the writing showing on the riverbed's sides. It can be interpreted as the personalisation and denotation of a place with the function of "the expression, foundation and maintenance of identity. People leave their traces on the environment (...) in order to display their individual characteristics and distance themselves from others." (Düll 2009) The narrator indicates that the readers (Timár and Timea) of this writing behave as the readers of different cultures and genders in the interpretation process, which marks their relation to each other.

A szürkület Ogradina táján találta a hajót, ott figyelmezteté Timéát a biztos a tizennyolc százados történelmi emlékre. Traján táblája az, a meredek sziklafalba vágva, két szárnyas angyal tartja, s sarkait delfinek veszik körül, a táblán az isteni császár emberi művének emléksorai. Timár odanyújtá a távcsövet, hogy olvassa el vele a sziklába vésett írást.

- Nem ismerem ezeket a betűket! - mondá Timéa.

Azok latin betűk. (Jókai 1994)

Dawn found the ship near Ogradina. The captain drew Timéa's attention to a monument eighteen hundred years old. This was "Trajan's Tablet," hewn in the precipitous cliff, held by two winged genii and surrounded by dolphins. On the tablet is the inscription which commemorates the achievements of the godlike emperor. (Jókai 2010)

(Translation omitted:

- I don't know these letters. - said Timéa.

These are Latin letters.)

The interpretation of the Latin writing reveals that cultures are unable to read each other, because their sign system is not universally understandable. Latin letters are unfamiliar to the Turkish girl, they are unravelled by Timár. Because they are not universal, they cannot be almighty or beyond “*the achievements of the godlike emperor*” (Jókai 2010) „*az isteni császár emberi emléksorai*” (Jókai 1994). Up against this human language it is worth taking a look at the Danube’s “writing”, the river’s “language” that is mediated by the narrator’s point of view. This writing is partially universal, making the signs visually perceptible, it becomes the same for every reader.

[E]gyik fal sima, mint a csiszolt gránit, vörös és fehér erek cikáznak végig rajta: rejtelmes istenírás betűi (Jókai 1994)

One wall is smooth as polished granite, red and white veins zigzagging across it like mysterious characters in the handwriting of God. (Jókai 2010)

This writing was not created by the God imitator man with “*iron-clad hand*” criticised in the novel. It was carved on the surface by different laws and energies. The tension between the space and its readers is shown by the Danube’s surface.

In *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn* space bears similar lines.

De a város nem beszél múltjáról, magába zárja, mint tenyérvonalait a kéz, felrajzolva az utcák hajlatába, az ablakok rácsaira, a lépcsők korlátaira, a villámhárítók antennáira, a zászlók rúdjaára, minden vonalat át- meg átszelnek a még újabb karcolások, fűrésznyomok, vésések, vonalkák. (Esterházy 1990, 138)

The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls. (Esterházy 1999, 145)

As lines get written onto space, traces of inner and outer vibrations get onto the skin¹⁸ where memory, spiritual processes and different cultural codes become visible. The sketches and writings on the Danube and the scars on the human skin become readable surfaces “The wound on the body is not only a distinguishing mark of the person and the basis of identification, but it is also the place where the body can become text, where it can enter

¹⁸ “I bear on my skin a whole album of wounds which I owe to you: the brand, the chain-sore, the sword-cut, and the dog's bite.” (Jókai 2010) / „Egy eleven album az én bőröm, tele a teérted kapott sebekkel; bélyegsütés, lánc-törés, kardvágás, kutyaharapás, mind, mind a te baráti emlékjeleid a testemen. Most mondd, hogy mit csináljak én teveled, hogy ki legyünk egymással egyenlítő?” (Jókai 1994)

“...and naked, too, the wretch's soul stood there, and it too was full of loathsome wounds inflicted by Timar's hand.” (Jókai 2010) „És a lelke is éppen olyan meztelenül állt előtte, az is tele utálatos sebhelyekkel, és azokat is az ő keze verte rajta.” (Jókai, 1994)

literature. It can be interpreted as a letter, as a sign, a hieroglyph which becomes readable at the appropriate point in the text. Those texts which explicitly foreground this particular signification of the body tend also to refer to a recurrent effort in literature to turn the body into text.” (Zsadányi 2004) For Esterházy, scars are caesura similar to historical fractures.

A seb egyszerre volt rettenetes, mintha egy rés, szakadék lett volna az arcán, valami régi ügy, valami ott maradt, archaikus botrány, amiről inkább nem beszélünk, és egyszerre bagatellizálta is mindezen elképzeléseket, inkább megfiatalította az arcot, egy rosszcsont kölök képét vetítve az asszonyéra. Mindez, azt hiszem, a szemének volt köszönhető... (Esterházy 1990)

The scar was at once horrifying, like a crack or cavity in her face, the mark of some ancient affair, some archaic scandal, about which the less said the better, and at the same time seemed to dismiss all such thoughts as trifles, and actually made the woman look younger, projecting onto her face the image of a somewhat wicked child. And the reason for all this was, I think, her eyes. (Esterházy 1999)

The past, the body becoming a memorial site of self-history manifests in the scars, similarly to how the text tries to interpret the Danube's line in space and time. In Jókai's novel there is a memorial mark that is the imprinting of a conflict and that can be linked to the memorial tablets on the Danube's bed representing the Western culture and power. A Western woman's signature turns up on the Eastern, statue-like woman's face.

Hanem aztán rejthetlen elégtelenség árulja el magát vonásain, mikor belép Timéa, és Athalie látja ezt az arcot, szoborfehéren, mint valaha, és e fehér homlokon a halántékig egy piros vonalat, a gyilkos vágás sebhelyét. Ez az ő emléke. (Jókai 1994)

But in spite of that she showed unconcealed satisfaction when Timéa entered, and Athalie saw the face paler than ever, the red line over the marble forehead, the scar from the murderous blow; this memento was from her. (Jókai 2010)

In Esterházy's novel the Danube is often shown as a line drawn as on a map, on the skin, on the body interpreted as an area. Thus, the reading of scars on the skin and the reading of the river get closely connected. We can determine that the novel reads, interprets, grasps geographical space, history and the body along different lines.

*Ujjával finom vonalat húz a homlokon végig (Győr, Komárom), bekanyarodva a szemgödörbe (Visegrád), le a remegő orr mentén a korallpiros ajkakig (Baja).
– Duna – mondja a nőnek bizakodva. (Esterházy 1990, 173)*

*The man tries to draw the map of Hungary on the woman's face. He sketches a fine line across her forehead with his finger (Győr, Komárom), sweeping into the socket of her eye (Visegrád), down along her bumpy nose to the coral-red lips (Baja).
'The Danube', he whispers intimately to the woman. (Esterházy 1999, 183)*

The line of the face merges with a decisive line of space, drawing the decisive mark of identity on the skin's surface as on a map. The area, the Danube is part of self-identification, of identity that is in close correlation with the body's lines and the body as a whole.

Touch works differently in Jókai's novel, but is similarly closely linked to the Danube and to scars. The experience of the stranger appears in this touch (we are at the beginning of the story). The woman's body, artificially put to sleep, lies in the ship sailing on the Danube, and Timár can make her regain consciousness only by using a substance. The woman figure is a painting and a statue, bearing the attributes of two media. Thus, reviving is the moment of the work of art coming to life. The Christian and the Muslim culture and myth contradictorily meet in the touch of the body that is linked to the sacred spaces of the Danube. This is how the woman's body merges with the Danube, and becomes the canvas of Timár's problems of self-understanding and his own strangeness.

Timár remegve nyúlt hozzá, mintha egy elbűvölt tündéralakot tapintana, kinek érintésétől a szegény halandó életvesztő szívfájdalmakat kap. Az üvegcsében levő illó szesszel elkezdé az alvó halántékait bedörzsölni. És közben folyvást figyelt arcára (...) Az alvó arc pedig semmit sem változott a homlokán és halántékain tett bedörzsölésre; két összeérő vékony szemöldöke ráncot sem vont homlokán, midőn az idegen férfi kezei érinték. Az utasítás azt mondá, hogy szívögödrét is be kell az ellenszerrel dörzsölni (...) a szőnyeg alatt dörzsölé be ujjaival a szeszt az alvó alak szívögödrébe, s hogy ment legyen minden kísértettől, folyvást a lány arcát nézte azalatt. Olyan volt az, mintha egy oltárképet nézne, melyről a hideg sugárzik. Egyszer aztán felnyíltak a sötét szempillák, s a két szem sötéten, ragyogástalanul tekintett elő. (Jókai 1994)

Timar approached her as if she were an enchanted fairy whose touch might cause deadly heart-sickness to a poor mortal. He began to rub the temples of the sleeper with the fluid from the bottle. In doing so, he looked continually in her face (...) The lovely face remained unchanged, in spite of the friction on brow and temples; the delicate meeting eyebrows did not contract when touched by a strange man's hand. The directions were that also over the heart the antidote must be applied. (...) And then he spread the Persian quilt, which the girl had thrown off in her sleep, over her whole person up to her neck, and rubbed above the heart of the sleeper with wetted fingers, while, in order to resist temptation, he kept his eyes fixed on the maiden's face. It was to him like an altar-picture—so cold, yet so serene. (Jókai 2010)

Egy alabástromszobor az. Egy szobor, mely hajlik, simul, enged, de nem él. (Jókai 1994)

She is a marble statue – a statue which bows, dresses itself, submits, but is not alive. (Jókai 2010)

The connection of body and space in the two novel closures

In Jókai's novel the lines meet at the Lower Danube's banks. In the last two chapters the movement of the characters' bodies is worth comparing to the situation in the geographical space they are located in. What takes place is partly Timea's death, partly the total change of Timár's identity, his placement outside of society and his personality's identification with the existence of an island.

S mikor halálát közelegni érzi, leviteté magát Levetincre, nehogy ha meghal, ama sírboltba temessék, ahol ki tudja, ki porladozik Timár címere alatt. Ott keresett ki magának egy csendes fűzfás partot a Duna mellett, azon a tájon, ahol atyját elveszté, ahol Ali Csorbadzsi a Duna fenekén nyugszik; olyan közel a „senki szigetéhez”, mintha vonzotta volna őt oda valami titkos sejtés... Az ő sírköve s a sziget téveteg sziklája láthatják egymást szemközt. (Jókai 1994)

And when she felt the approach of death, she had herself taken to Levetinczy, that she might not be placed in the tomb where God knows who mouldered away under Timar's name. There she sought out a quiet willow grove on the Danube shore, in the part nearest to where her father, Ali Tschorbadschi, rested at the bottom of the river: as near to the ownerless island as if some secret instinct drew her there. From her grave the island rock was visible. (Jókai 2010)

The placement of the body near the Danube happens close to the border crossing, at No Man's Island. In this picture the text identifies Timea with the grave plate made of stone through the sense of “sight”, with the help of which the woman's perspective faces No Man's Island. This is a permanent look (gravestone) moulded into matter that cannot be eliminated because it continually serves remembrance with its presence and function. The woman constantly characterised as a statue gets in immediate contact with stone and with the Danube's church-like landscape. In the world of the novel the body of the father, the sunken Turkish man can also be found here. The ground, space, as the bearer of the past and of history fills with hidden memories.

No Man's Island is also located here, close to the border. Just as the female character becomes part of the landscape by death, the man also assimilates to the island in his mode of being.

A múlt években egy öreg természettudós barátom, ki fűvészi és rovargyűjtői nevezetesség volt nemcsak hazánkban, de az egész tudós világban, beszélt előttem azokról a kivételes földterületekről, amik a magyar és török birodalmak között találhatók meg, s minthogy egyik félhez sem tartoznak, magántulajdont sem képeznek; és emiatt valóságos Kaliforniái a szenvedélyes természetbúvárnak, ki ott a legritkább

flórát és faunát találja együtt. Az én öreg barátom minden évben meg szokta e helyeket látogatni, s heteket tölt ott szenvedélyes búvárlatai közt.

Egy ősszel rábeszélte, hogy menjek el vele én is. Magam is műkedvelő vagyok e szakban. Üres időm volt, elkísértem az öreg tudóst az Al-Dunára. (Jókai 1994)

Some years ago, an old friend of mine, a naturalist, who is celebrated as a collector of plants and insects throughout the world, described to me the singular district between Hungary and Turkey, which belongs to neither State, and is not any one's private property.

On this account it offers a veritable California to the ardent naturalist, who finds there the rarest flora and fauna. My old friend used to visit this region every year, and stay there for weeks zealously collecting specimens: he invited me to share his autumn expedition. I am somewhat of a dilettante in this line, and as I had leisure, I accompanied my friend to the Lower Danube. (Jókai 2010)

We arrive at a space which lies outside any power struggle and system, a family withdrawn from society where the origin is the “Nobody” who rewrites his own past and story by disappearance.

In Esterházy's novel we arrive across Romanian territory to the Delta, the sea. The search for the Danube and the constantly unsuccessful experiment of creating a personal story and a uniform historical narrative runs into the sea at Sulina. The formation of a uniform, superior meta-narrative is impossible through the constant change of perspective, just like the definition of a river embracing the area desired to know. Only fragments, parts can be known. In the Delta, at the end, words come apart. On the emblematic anniversary of the death of origin, of the mother, the sun, that helps sight with its light, is “shot down”, while the narrator falls asleep, closes his eyes in the lap (delta) of an unknown, foreign language-speaking girl, thus closing the text stream without sight and language.

Bérlemény újra meglátta a téren a kislányt. Kicsit tartott ettől a találkozástól. I am... Mit kell most csinálnia? De nem kellett semmit, a lányka leült mellé a padra, ő az ölébe hajtott a fájós fejét, és megpróbált elaludni. Erősen sütött a Nap, melyet pedig már agyonlőttek. Vége. A lány arcán éles kegyetlen vonal, kifejezéstelen tekintettel a Dunára mered, keze lágyan a férfi hajában. Bérlemény arra gondolt, hogy ha majd fölébred, bemásolja a cédulájáról a füzetbe a neveket, azon hajókét, melyeket ma, augusztus 14-én látott: Razelm, Istria, Salvator, Bucureni, Polar, Malnaş, Izer, Mîndra, Costila, Tîrnava, Somes, Caraiman, Topliţa, Polar XI, Cînaş, Snagov, Mizil, Lupeni, Rîureni, Athanassios D, Tîrgu Jiu, Braşov, Vîrsan, Călimăneşti, Gheorgheni, Voiaş, Leopard, Cardon, Cocora, Dorobanţi, Cormoran, Pontica, Căciulata, Grădina, Amurg, Colina, Zheica, Semnal. (Esterházy 1990, 231)

On the square the Hireling saw the little girl again. He was a little frightened of this meeting. I am ... What was he to do now? But he didn't have to do anything: the girl sat down on the bench beside him, he thrust his aching head in her lap and tried to sleep. The sun shone brightly, in spite of having just been shot dead. The end. On the girl's

face a sharp, cruel line. She stares at the Danube without expression, and softly runs her fingers through the man's hair. The Hireling decided that when he woke up he'd find his slip of paper and copy down into his notebook the names of all the ships he'd seen that day, 14 August: Razelm, Istria, Salvator, Bucureni, Polar, Malnaș, Izer, Mîndra, Costila, Tîrnava, Somes, Caraiman, Toplița, Polar XI, Ciucaș, Snagov, Mizil, Lupeni, Rîureni, Athanassios D, Tîrgu Jiu, Brașov, Vîrsan, Călimănești, Gheorgheni, Voiajor, Leopard, Cardon, Cocora, Dorobanți, Cormoran, Pontica, Căciulata, Grădina, Amurg, Colina, Zheica, Semnal. (Esterházy 1999, 244)

Both texts construe an ideal, imaginary space: in Esterházy's novel it is Konrád György's Eastern-Europe, and in Jókai's novel it is the No Man's Island's Rousseauian utopia, placed outside power systems. The existence of the Danube is an important element in the formation of both spaces. But they form it and use the river's phenomenon differently.

The aspects of my analysis are based on the Danube's different forms as text, surface and identity. I analysed their relationship in the perspective of the two novels. Péter Esterházy's novel is constantly aiming at deconstructing the renaissance space, showing that we cannot trace a uniform human perspective that embraces everything. We can only sense and interpret in a fragmented way, because something is always left out or hidden. Interpretation attempts are nonetheless important, because we exist and experience the world through them. Interpretation works with the constant waggle of questioning and perspectives. "Elsewhere is a negative mirror." This is linked to important questions such as: is there individuality and is there fate?

Mór Jókai's text, where the characters are unable to get over themselves, they scratch the surface, they try to break through it, but they only meet their own image and mirrors everywhere, can be associated with this metaphor. In this respect, the relativity and discrepancy of sight and sense shows through here in their most exact definitions. In *Timar's Two Worlds* the interpretation of people and society happens through the reading and interpretation of the Danube and its area. Besides the unifying concept of history, we can constantly see its destruction and the many faces of space.

References

- Crary, Jonathan. 1999. *Techniques of the Observer On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. (Available at: https://monoskop.org/images/6/65/Crary_Jonathan_Techniques_of_the_Observer.pdf accessed 2016. 01. 07.)
- Düll, Andrea. 2009. *A környezetpszichológia alapkérdései: helyek, tárgyak, viselkedés*. Budapest: L'Harmattan.
- Esterházy, Péter. 1990. *Hahn-Hahn grófnő pillantása (The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn)*. Budapest: Magvető Publishing.
- Esterházy, Péter. 1999. *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn (down the Danube)*. Translated from Hungarian by Richard Aczel. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Füzi, Izabella and Török Ervin, eds. 2006. *Vizuális és irodalmi narráció. Bevezetés az epikai szövegek és a narratív film elemzésébe*. (Available at: <http://mmi.elte.hu/szabadbolcseszlet/mediatar/vir/tankonyv/tartalom.html> accessed 2016. 01. 07.)
- Gángó, Gábor. 2009. *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia az irodalomban*. (Available at: <http://www.f-book.com/> accessed 2016. 01. 07.)
- Harbsmeier, Michael. 2006. Az útleírások mint a mentalitástörténet forrásai. *Korall*. vol. 7 no. 26: 25–53. (available at: http://epa.oszk.hu/00400/00414/00018/pdf/EPA00414_Korall_2006_26_025harbsmeier.pdf accessed 2016. 01. 07.)
- Jókai, Mór. 1994 [1872]. *Az arany ember. (Timar's Two Worlds)*. (Available at: <http://mek.oszk.hu/00600/00688/00688.pdf> accessed 2016. 01. 07.)
- Jókai, Mór. 2010 [1888]. *Timar's Two Worlds*. Translated from Hungarian by Mrs. Hegan Kennard. New York. (Available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31409/31409-h/31409-h.htm> accessed 2016. 01. 07.)
- Konrád, György. 1984. *Van-e még álmom Közép-Európáról? (Does the Dream of Central Europe Still Exist?)* (Available at: <http://dia.pool.pim.hu/html/muvek/KONRAD/konrad00166/konrad00179/konrad00179.html> accessed 2016. 01. 07.)
- Mulvey, Laura. 1999. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism*. In *Introductory Readings*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 833–44. New York: Oxford UP. (Available at:

http://www.composingdigitalmedia.org/f15_mca/mca_reads/mulvey.pdf accessed 2016. 01. 07.)

Margócsy, István. 2013. Jókai Mór jellemábrázolásáról. *2000 Irodalmi és társadalmi havilap*. (Available at: <http://ketezer.hu/2013/10/kalandorok-es-szirenek/> accessed 2016. 01. 07.)

Zsadányi, Edit. 2004. Writing on the Body, the Body in writing. In. *The Anatomy of the Reason, the Body, and the Soul*, ed. Katalin Tímár, 63–69. Budapest: Ludwig Museum Budapest – Museum of Contemporary Art.

Sontag, Susan. 1977. *Illness as Metaphor*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Available at: https://monoskop.org/images/4/4a/Susan_Sontag_Illness_As_Metaphor_1978.pdf accessed 2016. 01. 07.)