

**PHD THESIS**

**Space Concepts, Name Maps, Border-line Identities**

**Space and Name Poetics of Bodor's-Prose, and Its Effects on  
Contemporary Hungarian Prose**

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## Objectives, Applied Methods

The literary texts analyzed in my PhD thesis are bound together by their spatial embedding, spatial dependence and their linguistic materializing in space. I intend to describe spatial embedding and hence – in the duality of coming into existence and coming to an end – the definition of border-line identity which is difficult to define margins languages and cultures. This, in prosaic intercultural texts receives a constitutive role through the topics of denomination, retention, alterity / alienage.

From this point of view, the duality of reception of literary texts becomes visible, since the emerging toponyms result in a map which enables referencing, but, at the same time, these texts underline their literary mediality, their creation in language.

The geopoetical notion of space – including world interpreting and semantic structure – has a self-interpretive role, as well. The process of getting familiar with Ádám Bodor and his literary work – short stories, novels, interviews – started many years ago. Reading his work of art opened a different, unknown, but strongly intercultural dimension, leading me towards similar prosaic texts. The openness of Bodor's-prose, its multi-sensuality, its unsettleable expressions and his constantly being in between sense units, pushed me towards to look for texts belonging to the "Sinistra-space".

Ádám Bodor's *Sinistra District* – together with his other prose works from the mid-sixties – became one of the representative artworks of the Hungarian literature in the nineties. The multi-angled analysis of the Bodor-prose – the interpretation(s), combined with the continuous search for a final meaning – brought to life not only different interpreting communities, but also sketched ways to creating new prosaic artworks. The aim of this thesis is to identify some of the figures of style present also in Bodor's-prose in newer prosaic works and highlighting in topics the changes that occurred.

Given the undefined and multi-sensual character, these texts become open and vague depending on their interpretation. The Bodor-texts and the ones written by his younger followers also allow for "localized" reading, but, at the same time, they can be treated in isolation – this is where their unequalled power lies: they transubstantiate this ambivalence into language.

In my PhD thesis spatiality becomes a research principle not through its objective, but through its creative, generative nature. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari base their geophilosophical spatial thesis on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's programmatic statement: "space is not such a medium in which things get settled, but a medium through which things get settled" when they elaborate on thinking, and the relationship between Earth and Space. While locating *place*, continuous attempts of *defining borders*, the road, travelling, being on the road and the feeling of being pathless, being lost, disorientation and the frequent use of the alterity-metaphor that follows from this in literary texts, I used Kornélia Faragó's summaries. The journey is defined as a possible tool to recognize identity, as a poetical opportunity for understanding, self-constitution and self-understanding. Throughout the journey we get to know not only the Other, the alien, but also the Other within us, our own Other. The (cultural) presence of the Other, the movement towards getting acquainted with alterities, the shifts, the border-line identities that came to life on the way, the contradictory identities, fake identities and border-line identities are concepts that I approached from the works of Ian Chambers, Stuart Hall, Zygmunt Bauman on cultural research and multiculturalism. Regarding the alterities experienced on the way and also analyzing alienisms I applied Georg Simmel's concept of alienage.

Eponymy is characterized by text-constituent and space-constituent aspects in the linguistic foundation of the analyzed texts. The practice of eponymy is strongly related to the linguistic and world approach of the artist, the anthroponymies and toponyms organically integrate into the poetic system of the works of art. At a certain level eponymy means fixation and confinement, isolation, iterativity of the names assures permanence in the constant movement and shift; they create and authenticate the relatively uniform text-space. The name system generates a discursive space which conditions the tone of the writing and hints at the denominator. Regarding the researches in eponymy, I relied mainly upon the article written by François Rigolot and Szergej Bulgakov, entitled *A név hatalma* (The Power of the Name), which appeared in *Helikon, Irodalomtudományi Szemle*.

I analyzed reticence, silence and interruption within the texts on the verge of the related works of the following authors: Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*A közvetett nyelv és a*

*csend hangjai* [The Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence]), Maurice Blanchot (*A megszakítás* [The Interruption]), Gérard Genette and Edit Zsadányi.

I analyzed the intertextuality mainly within texts of Gérard Genette.

## Interpretations

### 1. Eponymy and Reticence in Ádám Bodor's Prosaic Spaces

The variety of character names and the analysis of toponyms which confine text-spaces of Ádám Bodor's prose mobilize various interpretation strategies, the name-conglomerate gives the opportunity for analyzing different cultural and linguistic presumptions from the geopoetic point of view of Bodor's-prose. I analyze spatiality not from its objective, but from its creative, generative nature, concluding in a perambulation of identity concepts, that developed in the intercultural space and were moved by associative spaces (relations formed by space and spatialization of these relations) – resulting from coming round the performing figures which can be identified on the name map of Ádám Bodor's novels.

In the chapter entitled “Térképzetek, térbe írt terek” (Space Conceptions, Spaces in Spaces), I analyze space, the meaning-constitutive role of space-formation in the Bodor novels, enforced by the *Sinistra körzet* (Sinistra District), its paratext and its title. In both of his novels, space is formed by boundaries, which result in an open text-space, even in its closeness. The stage of the *Az érsek látogatása* (The Archbishop's Visit) represents the boundary in its concreteness, the identification of the territory becoming thus relative because of the “natural catastrophe”. A correlation exists between Sinistra körzet and Bogdanski Dolina, so the area as space and people populating place(s): the space influences the people's behavior – the area influences its inhabitants, that is why they become citizens of Sinistra and Bogdanski Dolina – but the people living there create Sinistra and Bogdanski Dolina, they spatialize it through their internal and external relations: it is their own embodiment. The *Sinistra körzet*, as well as the space of the *Az érsek látogatása*, can be localized due to the chronotopic coordinates, but at the same time it can be placed anywhere because of borderland and edge characteristics of the universal patterns.

Being on the road, the journey, plays a text-constituent role in Bodor's two novels (*Sinistra körzet* and *Az érsek látogatása*). However, this journey takes place in a well defined, well *delimited* space. The spot – the *where to* (before arrival) and the *where from* (after leaving) – can be accurately defined, but it is not relevant because it does not offer a real alternative to the parting traveler. They represent the same linguistic medium. The road and the journey, construct the space. Road becomes space and – given their correlation and interaction – space becomes road. In constant motion and shift, (self-) identity becomes unstable.

The border-line existence results in a liminal existence articulating the spatiality of betweenness. Betweenness is also the metaphor of being on the road, which means crossing two or more borders, as well as the steadiness of interborder movement.

The text-space of Bodor's-prose can be mapped on the border-land of interpretive fields of different cultures' meeting point. On the border-line where different cultures, mentalities and languages meet, identity is fragmented, differences and similarities in-between the characteristics and discrepancies become vague and relativized in the betweenness. The exact definition, and setting of any concept becomes doubtful in the intercultural border-line space. This may also be a starting point for interpreting throughout the search for identities, which turn into *border-line identities* in the betweenness.

Not only do name and eponymy have an identifying or labeling role, but they also evoke cultural connotations by including associate spaces and creating links. The structure of Bodor-novels' identity is characterized by contradictory identities, fake identities, border-line identities. Identifications are in motion, they perpetually shift.

The associative-interpretive movements evolved from the names lead us to the conclusion that in Ádám Bodor's prose an imaginary map is being constructed. Therefore, I deduce the existence of endemic narration; these places function as narrative figures of style, they also play a story-telling role, resulting in a sketch of a separate map of these, operational only inside the text.

In the reticence chapter I analyze one of the text-building components of Ádám Bodor's prose: *the reticence figure*. The scope of the reader's search has developed into the coming into sight of the hidden, mysterious, unshowable side, or of the rejection and

the mystery inside the “speaking” text pieces standing instead of the unsaid and the reticence. Concealment becomes material only through speaking out within the domain of manifestation. The omitted, hidden, retained things “are there but they are not visible”.

I pointed out the multitude of reticences with determining function in the Bodor’s-prose through the role of the indefinite pronoun something/somebody in the text. The *something* refers to the unknowable but implicitly contains the unknown, too. The *involvement into something* and the experience of its unavailability and imperativeness belongs to both novels’ main story. The “involvement into something” phrase is one of the most important text-building elements of Bodor’s-prose: the missing answer given to the *into what* question can be perceived as reticence. “Involvement” is assumed as one of the most important linguistic formulations of the area. This expression - with its indetermination – generates Bodor’s textual world, embodying all the plasticity, unpredictability, ambivalence and linguistic uncontrollability that characterizes the world of the *Sinistra körzet*.

## **2. The Dialogue of Novels – the Novel(s) of Dialogues**

In this chapter I investigate the trans-textual aspects of Ádám Bodor and Zsolt Láng prose connection. In the prose of the latter I analyzed mostly the orthodox religion, liturgy, Hungarian orthodoxy, the Romanian image due to the dominance of the alterity/alienage – images that were influenced by the interactivity of cultural spaces and constructed on the border-lines of the cultural strata.

I interpret the construction of reticent worlds familiar in both Láng’s- and Bodor’s-prose. Thus, they refer to the “retained story line” and the undefinable identity of the narrative position, to the development of border-line identity, to mythless intention of the stories which have deceiving missions. In relation to this, we can follow the role of oblivion and icon treated in Láng’s work of art and Ádám Bodor’s newest short-story, *Melissa Bogdanowitz lábnyoma* (The Footprints of Melissa Bogdanowitz).

## **3. Postbodorian Trend**

In this chapter I analyze the works of Bodor’s followers. The mainstream of the last decades’ ways of expression and prose is constituted by the narratives on “the common

Eastern European misery” and on its identity. They also tackle issues related to the alterity/alienage–image. Two of the most representative survival-stories generated by fear and defenselessness are: György Dragomán’s novel entitled *A fehér király* (The White King) and Sándor Zsigmond Papp’s volume of short stories entitled *Az éjfékete bozót* (The Black Bush).

Dragomán and Papp both follow the relativizing prose-poetic technique that Bodor uses: they mix referenceable, decodable elements in the prose-texture so that later on they can diverge from them. The open, looseend writing technique and the delay of identificative acts indicate Bodor’s prose-poetical procedures. Even the speakers’ language is questionable for us (as well as the speakers’ language in the Bodor- and Papp-prose): the multiethnic location implicates a mixture of language. The name database familiar from the Bodor- and Papp-prose also has a space-building function: the names outline the space which delimits the events.

The short stories of the *Az éjfékete bozót* emphasize a transitory term, the texts sketch the pre- and post period of the change of regime in the Eastern European countries. The existence of dictatorship and its repercussions has not only external, but also *internal* signs imprinted into space: the undetachable marks of defenselessness and the fear that got under the people’s skin throughout the years, that people carry within their souls – as it can be seen in Bodor’s work.

The cyclic character of the Dragomán and Papp writings, the implicit or explicit intertextual relations, the quotations from the *Az Eufrátesz Babilonnál* (*The Euphrates at Babylon*), as well as from the *A borbély* (The Barber) are some results of the Bodor-effect.

#### **4. Journeys Inside Alterity**

This chapter analyzes two texts regarding alterity/alienage, narratives of journey and mythlessness. Zsuzsa Selyem’s prose entitled *9 kiló* (9 Kilos) brings to surface the text-building role of the alterity/alienage figure already on the level of the narrators, whose estrangement represents the experience of alterity. The actors of the stories are also the actors of a narrative journey: during their trips and by being on the road, they step out of the dimensions of fixedness, through dislocations they face the Other, the

cultural alterities and experience alienage. Bodor's space-referenceability, as well as its continuous mobility characterizes the space-constituent of the *9 kiló*. The existence-journeys between transitory spaces draw an Eastern European abstract map of the transitory period. Understanding/explaining the chronotopos belongs to a complex problematising: the past-interpreter must deconstruct community myths in an emotionless manner, from an outer perspective point of view regarding mission-narratives.

Péter Demény's novel entitled *Visszaforgatás* (Rewinding) is connected to the theme of the thesis by the presence of border-line identity, as well as by visualizing the transitory period. The chronotopos of the novel's actions is the interim city of Kolozsvár (Cluj) in the eighties and nineties, with its multiple layers, Hungarians and Romanians, and also with its transient term. The "common narratives" influence the birth of the border-line identity, thanks to the unspeakable/unspoken temporal- and symptom-diagnosis of Hungarian-Romanian and Hungarian-Hungarian relations.

## Conclusions and Remarks

In the texts analyzed in the thesis, on the boundary and meeting points of different cultures, mentalities and languages, in the space of betweenness result the border-line identities.

The name of Andrej Bodor articulates as a "collective accumulative concept"; space proves to be the single entity of the *Sinistra körzet*, to which we can assign a (relatively) stable identity. The "world" shaped by space emerges to the surface in Andrej Bodor's voice, that is why the speaker's narrative position becomes the voice of the space. The mixture of (spoken) languages, multilingual specification presumes speaking through space, interlingual and intercultural state of being.

Demythization started by Ádám Bodor also continues in the prose-spaces I analyzed; the relativization of the theming identities in the *Sinistra körzet* and *Az érsek látogatása*, their border-located definiteness and the stories with fake mission can be found in the works of his followers as answers to the neotransylvanist predefined canon. The dominance of alterity/alienage-images constructed on the boundary of cultural layers and influenced by the medium of liminal cultural spaces takes shape in the writings of



Zsolt Láng, György Dragomán, Sándor Zsigmond Papp, Zsuzsa Selyem and Péter Demény.

The analysis of space-concepts, name maps, border-line identities which are defined by alterity/alienage-images in literary texts operate as a summoning. The research of the theme can be continued including other texts, the works of Attila Bartis and Gábor Vida may be subsequently subject to a similar interpretation in the future.

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