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Aufsatz

„A terribly heavy weight lies on a person's body"

The signs and possible meanings of the narrative of the body in Zsigmond Móricz's novel *Gold in the Mud*

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Abstract

The prose of Zsigmond Móricz is especially important for any research that focuses on textual representations of the body. It is even more so in the case of his first novel, *Gold in the Mud,* the narrative of which takes place in a rural-peasant milieu and which displays the complexity of interpersonal conflicts by the versatility of bodily desires and body representations. The present paper seeks to explore how character formation, narration, body representations and the irony, which continuously multiplies possible meanings are related to each other in the novel, which was recently published in English as well. In order to do so, it offers a comprehensive reading of the entire novel and a close reading of a highlighted chapter.
Keywords: representation of the body, (corporeal) narratology, Zsigmond Móricz

If, in modern Hungarian prose literature we seek an author in whose work a prominent role is played by the body, i.e., bodily desire, bodily experience, or bodily suffering, it seems appropriate to direct readers' attention to the works of Zsigmond Móricz. Many Móricz researchers have considered the main proof of the modernity of Móricz's writing to lie in those aspects in which bodily existence becomes the subject of narrative, something which previously had little or no precedent in Hungarian

literature.[1] In the present work, I undertake to focus on a single Móricz novel, *Gold in the Mud*, and to contribute to the reinterpretation of the text by examining the appearance of narratives of the body in the work. The choice is not only justified by the fact that this approach is particularly valid in this text, but also because – and in accordance with Mihály Czine's conclusion – "despite all its immaturity, *Gold in the Mud* is a key to Móricz's art and worldview" (Czine 1960: 323). Despite being a first novel, it includes all the questions – although they often only appear as markers for the future – that would be dealt with by the writer in later works. This analysis primarily seeks to explore the relationship between body representations and narration (in order to do so, the theory of *corporeal narratology* seems to be the most appropriate one to use[2]), in relation to which the paper wishes to map out the complexity of interpersonal relationships that are constructed by the body images.

[1] From among the previous studies, Imre Bori, for example, relates the prose-historical novelty of the early stage of Móricz career and the commitment of his life work to modernity to the appearance of the erotic and physical aspects of sexuality: "Obviously, the nature of the interpretation of gender can also be felt in Móricz's works, since it is the decisive motif in the development of the writer's "modernism": in this he found points of contact with the spirit of the era." (Bori 1982: 8). Recently, Ernő Kulcsár Szabó has examined the possibilities of the re-reading of Móricz's prose, and raised the issue of affection, relating it to the fact that the narrative solutions of mapping represented by bodily existence can open new perspectives in reading Móricz (Kulcsár Szabó 2014).

[2] *Corporeal narratology* can primarily be linked to the works of Daniel Punday, founder of the theory. By examining classic systems of narratology, Punday concluded that while the body has an increasing importance in various disciplines (e.g., feminist literary criticism, cultural studies), theories of narratology still lack this approach. He argues that "[d]espite its signal importance to so many schools of contemporary criticism, the human body largely failed to garner a significant place in narratology" (Punday 2000: 227). As a result, although it would be of utmost importance, "we have no »corporeal« narratology – no serious or sustained attempt to give the human body a central role within narrative" (Punday 2003: 2). It is for this reason that Punday created his own corporeal narratology, which, among other things, examines the possible relationships between body and narration, the links between the portrayal and "perception" of bodies and the characteristic features of (virtual) space, or the connections between characterization and embodiment. (For more details on corporeal narratology and its overlaps with other theories, see for instance: Brooks 1993; Doyle 1994; Prince 2005.) The present interpretation of *Gold in the Mud* is not exclusively rooted in the theoretical premises of corporeal narratology. This is partly due to the fact that although Punday's initiative is truly inspirational, the basic concepts and approaches of traditional narratology can't be missed in mapping out the meaning related to body representations in the novel.

The multiplicity of bodily representation in the novel

Gold in the Mud also draws attention to the importance of bodily representation in the text by the fact that there are a surprising number of descriptions of the body in the novel. Most of them do not simply acquire their sense as a realistic presentation of the physical features of a given person, but partly because – as Pierre Bourdieu notes in his paper – the body "behaves as a language, not so much as a language we speak, but as one that speaks of us, behaving as the language of nature, because it uncovers that part of our being, our essence which is buried most deeply, and at the same time in the truest way (since it is consciously the least controlled and at the same time the least controllable)" (Bourdieu 2008: 108). In addition, the physical features, the visible signs of the body related to each character, are repeatedly returned to in the novel, a feature which is not merely a means of characterization, nor simply the appearance of a reference to the state of mind or feelings of a given figure[3], but much more becomes a marker of relationships between people.

From this point of view, the overture of the novel has much to say, when, following sentences expressing generally valid concepts – which initially interpret the world of the novel as Móricz's topos of frequently recurring images associated with heat, suffering and destruction (Ernő Kulcsár Szabó and Gábor Bednanics have drawn attention to these multiple possibilities of meaning – Kulcsár Szabó 2014; Bednanics 2015) – the text immediately places a marriage crisis at the center of the reading (also indicating that the sociographic presentation of the peasant society or the village of the time is not the primary purpose of writing the novel). It is worth noting that before the narrator reveals anything about the marriage of Dani Turi and Erzsi Takács, the following detail gives the reader a clearer understanding of the conflict between the two sides (and their interpretation of the wife's point of view):

> When she saw her husband enter the yard, she turned her face halfway toward him, her features tainted by envy and rage. Neither their five years of marriage nor the two children born to them had compromised him in any way. Everything turned to good for him. The tanned man with his red cheeks was more handsome today than he'd been before their marriage, given the good care she's taken of him, practically fattening him up. She, on the other hand, is not what she once was; the brats have sucked the flesh

[3] In the introduction of his book, Punday examines the body interpretations of feminist critique, drawing attention to the fact that most earlier theories did not answer the question of what is the role of the body – or rather the ideas about the body – in forming various aspects of the narrative (e.g., plot, characterization, setting). As a result, "too often the body is taken to be a simple object of narrative, a thing to be represented like a town or a table, with little thought given to how it participates in the construction of narrative plot, location, agency, and so on." (Punday 2003: 7)

> from her limbs, while all the work and trouble have taken care of the rest (Móricz 2014: 4 – All other quotations are from this edition).

Soon after, the text views Erzsi's figure from Dani Turi's perspective:

> The man merely gazed at the woman with her fiery black eyes, her features distorted by anger. A peculiar, ambiguous emotion came over him as he considered the hell of those dark eyes, flashing from beneath her black, daringly arched eyebrows, her well-formed, snow-white forehead, from the framework of her starkly prominent cheekbones, sharply profiled, narrow nose and embittered mouth, those eyes that were nonetheless powerless to affect him… He understood why he had lately grown cool toward this woman, and yet it astonished him how quickly his blood began to boil these days. How beastly this woman was, simply beastly, made for kneeling, praying, and hating, but not for loving (10-11).

The spouses' contemplation and judgement of each other's bodies not only convey to the reader what the other is like (and more precisely what the other looks like), but also at the same time what it is that causes the irreconcilable conflict in their relationship. It is also undoubtedly true, however, that the rest of the novel views this opposition mediated by the representation of the body as a more complex problem (on the one hand, through the alternation of the constantly changing views of the other's and of their own bodies, and on the other hand by the introduction of differing explanations).

In the two passages already mentioned, the characteristic of Móricz's prose is that the perspective of the novel's (male) hero – partly due to the narratorial declarations which employ a free indirect speech style, and partly due to the assumed intentions of the author – subconsciously rules and "dominates" the utterances of the other characters. It is thanks to this that Takács Erzsi's bodily self-image – which self-mockingly anticipates her husband's *thoughts* – essentially follows Dani's point of view. This women's view of the body and the self which adapts to the (latent) male view is confirmed to the reader at other points in the novel. One of the most revealing of these is when the text attempts to convey Dani Turi's influence on women. The conversation of Bora and the Countess informs us about the sensual desire that is induced by the protagonist. From this discussion – of course, only on the basis of Móricz's characteristic way of intimating information – it emerges that it is the extraordinary beauty of Dani's penis that makes him irresistibly attractive to women:

> "They say" she added, "that the young ladies like him so much 'cause he's very, very beautiful there…" […] The Countess closed her eyes and felt a small voluptuous shiver of disgust run through her. A rush of blood flooded her brain (125).

As it is a conversation of two women who have not yet been assured of Dani Turi's exceptional physical condition at this point of the novel, the

said body part can be regarded as the sole attribute of the desired male (object) in their dialogue: it is strongly suspected that this is rather the kind of constructed (desire) image of the male that presupposes that the only irresistible object of physical attraction to woman is the phallus. A similar conversation in this sense occurs when, accompanied by Erzsi Dani, he meets Bora and Gyuri Takács (which is also a prominent one because it is the only time in the novel when all members of this particular "love square" are simultaneously present). Bora's interest in Gyuri provokes indignation from Erzsi, the reason for which is explained in such a way that the reader is confronted with an implied identity with the husband's point of view and value judgment:

> From a distance she [Bora] looked back toward Gyuri, and Erzsi saw that her husband caught her eye, and then grew as hard and grim as a stone idol. And Erzsi sensed these things alongside her husband and was suprised to recognize that she was indignant because the snotty girl hadn't fallen for him, but for Gyuri Takács instead (220).

The complexity of interpersonal relationships mediated by body representtations also contributes to the fact that in many cases, cultural codes mediated by language/behavior in the communication between the characters are constantly overwhelmed or undermined by body signals. When, for example, Dani Turi meets the lawyer's wife, the conversation – initially restricted to a schematic formalism – becomes more and more filled with banter and scurrilous remarks, accompanied by narrative signals of physical manifestations/responses by which in the enclosing *gaze* linked to the male perspective, and the somatic reaction related to it, the lusted image of the sexual act is manifest:

> His expressive blue eyes with their intimate gaze revealed in the beautiful lady and seemed intent on penetrating the elegant hosusecoat with its fine lace trim. His fascinated stare began to embarrass her. Her large dark eyes, in which the childish spontaneity of youth was paired with the clarity of rare intelligence, looked up toward the ceiling, and in this position she fully exposed to the visitor her beautiful, silky-soft face with its youthful, plump, kissable lips (61).

In the description, the man-centered view reflects the desire that shows the sexual fulfilment in the superiority of male power based on violence, and in the woman's affirmation and humble obedience. From the point of view of the whole novel, it is particularly emphasized that desire in this case is linked to the experience of the so far apparently unattainable (by physical bodily sensation) strangeness:

> This was the first time he'd actually seen a true genteel lady up close. Until now this opportunity had been so far removed from him that all curiosity had seemed pointless. But now, under the influence of the strong perfume, the unfamiliar aroma of heliotrope, he was seized by an unaccustomed physical excitement (60-61).

In this sense, for the protagonist, the attraction to the woman is primarily due to the difference in social standing, and there is no better indication of this than the fact that Dani Turi – before he had met her in person – already felt a rising desire for the Countess who is much more socially prominent than the lawyer's wife. What makes the (desired) strangeness deriving from the social differences in the world of the novel more complex, is the fact that the body representations related to the Countess are associated with scenes in which the narrator – as he does with other references in the text – places the interpersonal relations between the actors in a mythical context. Accordingly, at the first meeting with Dani Turi, the narrator sees the woman as a goddess of ethereal perfection and purity:

> Bright sunlight shone through it, Countess Helene, standing in the deep niche in her green silk veil resembled a goddess surrounded by the mist of the sea." (…) And it makes her feel good that the setting sun, with its warm red glow, shines on her and seems to produce a radiant haze from her ivory-white body. (…) Then she slowly steps forward. With the pride of a goddess, she steps directly into the bright sunlight. A full step into the radiant flood of light (130-131).

The Countess's identification with a goddess, based on both her social status and the moral purity and untouchability that are suggested by the metaphoric identification, becomes the signifier of her unattainability, which is however questioned by the ironic interpretations of the novel as a whole. The virginal purity of the woman is contested by the fact that she is conducting an extra-marital affair with her brother-in-law, and also by the fact that she is eager to be together with Dani. In any case, for the protagonist, the unavailability of an aristocratic woman (women) – based on his imagination rather than his real experience – is manifested in many cases as a desire in which the physical contact and the so far unexperienced otherness appear as a condition of happiness:

> Then he regarded the lady and the gentleman as they hugged each other with gentle ease. […] And when they'd kissed each other in this same manner, like the touching of butterflies' wings, Dani saw clearly that unattainable something that was missing from his women, his love affairs: this elastic tenderness, this subtle touching. The fanning of the flames, the non-corporeal quality of the body (65).

From this point of view, for Dani Turi social difference is interpreted as a kind of sexual strangeness: since verbal and nonverbal communication in relationships with women is almost always determined by the codes of sexuality and/or violence, so the countess's (physical, social) difference can only be translated back to him in this way. In the story of the hero, however, it is precisely this that becomes a contradiction, in that the aspiration to possess the Countess can be read both as conforming to a

relationship with women (according to which, just as with his wife and lovers, he seeks to violently subdue a woman who otherwise stands above him in the social hierarchy) and at the same time as its polar opposite (in that he is seeking physical affection built on gentle, mutual caring, which, of course, already has a subversive power due to its origin in social difference).

The difference between the desire for the (unknown) strangeness and the experience of familiarity becomes interpretable as part of the decisive opposition in the whole network of motives and in the narrative world of the novel, in which the anthropological duality and contradiction of naturalist and Christian/biblical discourses can be traced. The study by László Kemenes Géfin and Jolanta Jastrzębska also drew attention to the fact that in Móricz's works "the novelist breaks with the silence surrounding sexuality, does not conceal human sexual desires, and analyzes the "heavenly" and "terrestrial" aspects of love, starting from the Western, metaphysical point of view, that the human being strives to "completion", seeking to realize and fulfil his emotional desires in sexual love. These desires, however, collide with the proscriptions of Christian morality that result in a sense of sin and shared consciousness, especially in the case of men" (Kemenes Géfin & Jastrzębska 1998: 28). This is no different in the case of *Gold in the Mud* where suffering and unhappiness is the result of the irreconcilability of the two modes of operation: the protagonist is trying, but is unable to live up to Christian morality (the elements of which in the novel are his loyalty to his family, his wife, his social status and his role in the community), while the instinctive need to fulfil his physical desires – which in addition to achieving satisfaction of his physical needs is a rebellion against social, economic and ethical bonds – offers the only possibility of expressing his personality.

This interpretation of the interconnections of these motifs throughout the novel is also demonstrated by, among other things, the difference between male and female roles in relationship with the home. While Dani Turi is almost always "on the road" (doing business in the city or in the Count's mansion, working with reapers in the field, playing cards with the men at the teacher's house, and not least attracting women), Erzsi Takács never leaves home (in an exceptional case, only to flee her rampaging husband by escaping to her parents, or leaving the home *together* with their husband and children for a family visit). As is reflected in this part of the text which conforms to Dani Turi's perspective:

> While away, he'd long since forgotten what things were like at home. His coming and going, his contact with other people, the constantly changing impressions, his plans, the work and the ideas that had occupied his mind had all drawn his attention away from the one thing which, in the whole circular movement of his active and colourful life, was

> to him merely one of many dimensions; to his wife at home, however, it was the only dimension, because it constituted her entire life (78).

Being bound to the home as a deprivation of liberty, which is identified in the novel by the socio-cultural role of wife/mother (and also appears as an unbearable strangeness for the male hero), also becomes manifest when Dani Turi obeys his wife's wish and spends a long period at home, passing through a (physical) transformation that is interpreted as a sign of unmanliness:

> No, he no longer desired his work, his great plans had lost their appeal – he only remembered them as some vague dream. And as he moved among his little family there through the morning, in the glorious sunny weather, he quietly wished a wall would rise around his home reaching all the way to sky, so that he could see nothing and no one from the world beyond its gates (100-101).

> [D]uring lunch, during dinner he noticed with chagrin how he loaded up his plate. Sometimes he even noticed he was getting fatter. A feeling of chubbiness, of obesity, paralyzed his body, and that made him even more unhappy (104).

All this becomes intertwined throughout the novel, because in the meantime, Dani Turi – and to a certain extent the narrator of the novel – have different, partly conflicting explanations for the continuous struggle and the unhappiness in the marriage. Most of these explanations are closely related to bodily desires and their forced suppression.

The first of these is the marital problem so often expressed in Móricz's novels, that the wife responsible for creating family harmony is unable to fully satisfy the husband's, – Dani Turi's – physical desires. Interestingly, however, this does not become the most frequently mentioned theme, since there is a more frequent return to an emphasis on the idea that Erzsi, and family ties in general, become a barrier to Dani's intentions:

> *How obstinate she is! he told himself. She doesn't ask me where I'm going. God knows what a struggle it is when one's wife is not truly her husband's helpmeet! …I have to do everything against my wife's will. It's not enough that she doesn't support me, she has no faith in my undertakings and works against them…* (43. – emphasis in the original).

Even more telling are the remarks that make it clear that the greatest injury to Dani is that, unlike almost everyone else, he is unable to manipulate and exercise power over his wife:

> But does he really know what he wants? He only senses that his wife *isn't the way he'd like her to be.* He would have liked to picture a woman's nature as being as uncomplaining, tender, and peaceable as her master would ever have her be (212).

For Dani, however, Erzsi's ever-present alienation, both in sexual terms and in her opposition to becoming subordinate to him, is paradoxically

appealing to him, and makes him unable to leave her. The validity of the passages explaining unhappiness is not only undermined by the contradictions of each other's arguments, but also by the fact that at some points in the story even though the characters' desires are fulfilled, this does not mean an end to their suffering. For example, Dani's downfall is caused by his being pushed towards meaningless destruction by his longing for the Countess and the land he desires, and in parallel to this, the woman's erotic desire for Dani is literally fatal; in the same way, neither Gyuri Takács's love, nor her husband's short forced stay at home can bring Erzsi the calm she hopes for.

Fragile narrative – fragmented body experience (A close reading of a chapter in the novel)

The close connection between the desired (physical) happiness and the inability to eliminate suffering is shown most vividly in one chapter of *Gold in the Mud* (Part 2, Chapter 19), which has often been highlighted in previous interpretations[4], and not by chance: it is not only the close relationship between the representations of the body and the novel narrative which become apparent on a close reading – it also becomes evident that the chapter can be interpreted as a mise-en-abyme of the ironic ambiguity that is manifested throughout the text, but especially in its closing. In this chapter, we read a brief description of the Countess's situation following her sexual relationship with Dani Turi in what is, from a perspectival and narrative point of view, a rather unusual description, relative to the rest of the text.

The chapter directly follows the presentation of the series of events in which we find out that after a long period of mutual desire, the protagonist Dani Turi, eventually makes the Countess his. We cannot read about the act because at the end of the previous section the narrative is broken off precisely at the point where the characteristic actions that initiate the sexual act begin. Subsequently, Chapter 19 opens its unusual account with the following sentences:

> Her eyes opened in response to a bang, two bangs from far off. Her intelligent blue eyes looked out from beneath the long lids, wearily, with broken sheen. They remained open like this – for some time the supple shimmer of life could not penetrate the tired corneas. At last her consciousness awakened inside her brain.
> And the Countess noticed she was unbelievably weak (305).

[4] Csaba Onder, for example, examined the ironic relationships of the narrative of the sexual act and murder in the context of contemporary popular literature (Onder 2005) while Krisztián Benyovszky has compared the metaphorical characteristics of the interpretations of the detail in the Slovak translation of the novel (Benyovszky 2010).

The opening clauses focus on the awakening physical reactions: first, the sound, and then the vision appear as an unconscious sensation, which makes it impossible not only to experience the outside world, but also, at least for some sentences, to precisely identify the individual who appears as the object of the description.[5] By narrating the feelings which awaken the body, the reader becomes part of the degrees of the awakening of consciousness and the uncertainty of perception. Just as the opening eye sees, but does not actually perceive or understand (paradoxically this highlights the contrast in which the slightly strange sounding *intelligent* is here associated with the eye), the reader's reaction is the same: the text deprives him/her of the certainty and reference of what is recounted (that is, to whom the narrative is intended, who it is that feels, and what it is they feel). It is no coincidence that it only after the sentence that awakens self-consciousness does it become somewhat clearer to what situation and to whom the text refers. In what follows (and throughout the chapter as well), this logic prevails: in accordance with the very partial perception of the body, we are able to obtain fragmentary information which makes it difficult to reconstruct what is happening or has happened:

> She feels no pain, but is unable to lift her hand… Her legs hang off the sofa… her right leg dangles somewhere off in the emptiness, and she's powerless to draw it toward her. How nice it is that her arm hasn't fallen, how lovely that at least this lies next to her on the soft velvet of the sofa.
> Her consciousness again recedes.
> Then she hears a small noise, a steady, monotone sound…
> Drip, drip, drip (305).

In the description of the progressive awakening of self-consciousness, it becomes more emphasized that the individual parts of the body (limbs) can be perceived, independently of the whole body, as being disconnected from it. The distance and separation of the parts from the whole is represented as part of a narrative representation in which the perception of the inertia of the limbs (and the body) move from the clear reference meaning (*she […] is unable to lift her hand*) to increasingly unrealistic and metaphorical semantic domains (*her right leg dangles somewhere off in the emptiness*). In the typically ambiguous character of Móricz's free indirect speech, there is ambiguity surrounding how her arm has fallen, (*how nice it is that her arm hasn't fallen*) which, apart from falling from the bed, can theoretically include the idea of the removal of the limb, which acquires a clearly grotesque character, casting doubt on the operation of the self-conscious and the idea that awareness of one's own body would be accomplished by some sort of rational perception. This is also indicated by the fact that the

[5] This becomes increasing true in the original Hungarian text, where the lack of personal pronouns referring to gender makes it impossible to tell who is the subject of the first sentences.

passage of time (both for the character and the recipient) is shown as an unrecordable and uncertain experience (the *again* and the *then* indicate the unclear deixis). It is no coincidence that the perception of space and time in the description is closely connected to body representation, as Punday, referring to Bachtin, remarks in connection with the structure of the plot: "the way that a narrative will imagine space and time is inherently linked to the way that it positions bodies within that space" (Punday 2003: 94). When they first appear, the sentences characterized by the sound of dripping not only become questionable in relation to the earlier sentences, but also in terms of understanding to whom or to what the fall of the drops themselves refers. In the remainder of the chapter it is no coincidence that the corporal and narrative features that are created by the text follow a similar logic:

> It's wonderful to lie there, so leisurely, so completely.
> It's just that something is weighing down her right leg… She'd like to free it, to move it at the knee, let it fall where it may…
> A person isn't even in control of her own body. Why can't she move her leg? Why has it grown attached at the knee? How lucky the person is who has a wooden leg. He can simply unstrap it when it's just dangling there in the emptiness…
> She smiles… She thinks she smiled at this naive little thought. She is toying… she thinks she's toying with herself… How nice, how terribly nice it would be if her limbs didn't hang together so. If they just lay there one beside together.
> That would be perfect happiness…
> Then she rests there silently for a long time, a millennium, two millennia, knowing nothing of herself (305-306).

The desire to separate the limb cannot be understood merely as a further consideration of the aforementioned irrational, bizarre narrative body structure, but also as a description in which the body's uncontrollability is emphasized ("A person isn't even in control of her own body.") Accordingly, the body does not have a rational or even instinctive central organizing force capable of uniting and directing (body) parts. The narrative structure of the text is closely related to the representation of the described body: in the narrative language the broken nature of the sentences, the lines of fragmented statements make it impossible for narration to follow a purposeful logic that would reveal the rather mysterious events (that is, what actually occurred to the woman while she was together with Dani). All this is only enhanced by the hardly decodable references of the temporal deixes, which, by adapting to the countess's loss of her sense of time, makes it impossible for the reader to identify temporal relationships ("Then she rests there silently for a long time, a millennium, two millennia, knowing nothing of herself").

Besides, it is a further difficulty for the reader that the perspectives of the character and the narrator are in constant motion, since the narrative play of free indirect speech that merges perspectives is contrasted with the

sharp distinction of the two ("She smiles … She thinks she smiled at these naive little thoughts. She is toying … she thinks she's toying with herself."). Accordingly, it only gradually becomes apparent what must be happening/ have happened:

> Soon a light goes on within her, and she realizes she's lying naked on the sofa.
> And then she knows everything.
> Her face grows rigid, and she smiles. She thinks she's smiling, although her face is rigid…
> And again millennia come and go… What a long life man leads.
> Another sound.
> Drip, drip, drip…
> How happy she was today… Now. How very, very happy.
> That was good. That was worth death itself. It was so good.
> Something breaks within her, and now her blood flows. It's not bad… it's good…
> How does she know it's her blood that's dripping?" (306)

The perceived nudity of the countess – which again shows the body for the reader from the character's perspective – can only at this point make it clear in the context of the previous chapter that the description features the moments after making love with the "peasant Don Juan". In the light of this, it may seem that the uncontrollability and the perception which hovers on the borders of consciousness as a consequence of physical satisfaction becomes the determinant of the Countess's (and, thanks to the narration, of the reader's) uncertain feelings (this would be justified by, among other things, the text's repeated return to the traces of happiness). At the same time, however, it is gradually outlined that the immobilization and uncontrollability of the body is not necessarily due to the intoxicating experience of the fulfilment of sexual desires, but rather originates from the injury and agony experienced by the body. First, it is only the difference between the signs that are inscribed on the face due to the character's and the narrator's perspective ("Her face grows rigid, and she smiles. She thinks she's smiling, although her face is rigid…") that indirectly alludes to the rupture between the joy and happiness of the Countess (indicated by the smile) on the one hand, and the true state of the body that is interpreted by the synecdoche of a rigid face on the other. The stiffness of the face can already predict the threat of death, which is reinforced by the repeated vagueness of the reference to the length of human life ("What a long life man leads"). After the repeated indication of dripping, it also becomes apparent that death and dying are moving to her own body: the so far untraceable sounds are identified with the injury and bleeding of the Countess, despite the fact that in the uncertainty of the free indirect speech, it does not become clear to the character, nor to the narrator, that the auditory experience can be clearly attributed to injury ("How does she know it's her blood that's dripping?"). This particular inability to decide

also becomes dominant in the narrative structure of the subsequent description:

> That was worth dying for. That was good. That was good.
> Who said that her blood was dripping?
> She feels no pain. She's so pleasantly weak; it's nice to feel so weak, how nice it is to be so very weak.
> It's really good to lie there so softly. To lie in warm liquid; it's very, very nice to lie in one's own blood.
> Who said that her own blood was dripping?
> The chambermaid isn't allowed to come in unless she rings. How nice it is that the maid can't enter as long as she isn't dead. That's very good, very proper (306-307).

On the one hand, it remains unclear whose body the bleeding can be related to, just as it is not clear to the reader what injury brings the Countess to the point of death.[6] It also becomes apparent that the text incorporates more and more repetitive sentences and thoughts (whether we refer to the relationship between the happiness caused by satisfaction and the agony of the injured body, or to the repeated statements), which show a gradual, slow loss of consciousness, and thus make the suspected process of dying perceptible to the reader. Accordingly, towards the end of the chapter, the causal explanation and purposeful self-consciousness which describes events moves further into the background and become less possible. At one point, however, the elliptical description of the functioning of the Countess's body which continues throughout the chapter, is changed to a description constructed from a distance, which also allows the chapter to be interpreted in the context of the novel as a mise en abyme of the whole work:

> Poor peasant… Poor dear…
> A terribly heavy weight lies on a person's body.
> Why does a person's blood drip?
> Poor peasant. Handsome… Strong!… Love! Love!… That's love…
> My God, my Lord… hallowed be thy name… it's really nice to lie like this… My God, but it's nice…
> Drip, drip, drip… (307).

After recalling the person of Dani Turi, who, as in the previous chapter, has been identified only by his social status (as a peasant), the statements regarding the human body's burden can refer both to the Countess herself, and to the Other (Dani Turi) who is the cause of both happiness and suffering, and ultimately, in general, to human existence as well. The particular representations of the body in the chapter can also be read as the

[6] Krisztián Benyovszky takes note of what speculative interpretations have been made of the injuries suffered by the woman on the bed, but as she stresses, it is in fact "unclear to the reader what the reason is for the Countess's bleeding" (Benyovszky 2010: 248-249).

interplay of possible meanings in the closing of the novel and in its whole, and as a kind of summary. The bizarre position of the Countess agonizing in her happiness includes an anthropological idea that the instantaneous happiness that can be grasped in the satisfaction of bodily desire leads in the end to human suffering, which is experienced in the relationship with the eternal Other (that is why in the novel everyone causes everyone else's suffering; and there is no happiness for anyone after the fulfilment of their desires). On the other hand, a narrative about the destruction of the body, or vice versa, the narrative which creates that destruction, does not explain the Countess's story, and also leaves open to the reader the question of what the woman's fate will be.[7]

This is closely related to the brutal destruction and double murder committed by Dani Turi after his amorous appointment with the Countess: and so, again, as I move away from close reading, I will attempt to uncover how the satisfaction of desire discussed above is developed in the narrative signs referring to the body in the last two chapters of the novel.

Naturalistic instinct and/or Christian cleansing? – The relationships between narratives of desire and suffering

Besides the events in Part 2, Chapter 19, because of the narration of events at the end of the novel it is common to regard *Gold in the Mud* as typical of Móricz's naturalism. Csaba Onder, for example, has noted that the description of double murder after sexual satisfaction can be interpreted as a well-known motif of naturalist poetics: "Since Zola the subject of the simultaneous sexual act and murder, introduced as often and with as many persons as possible (as a metaphor for the achievement of perfection), has been a mandatory naturalistic template" (Onder 2005: 126). He also pointed out that the exaggerations in the description of the murder – which, besides being a thoughtful composition of events bears a close affinity with melodramatic rhetorical solutions of contemporary penny dreadful literature – in an ironic reading undermine the validity of naturalist interpretation and anthropology. As a further consideration, it is worth examining how the text speaks of the murders Dani Turi commits and the events which follow them, and what explanation is given for the events and the motives of the characters.

As to the question of why the protagonist kills the returning Count, and afterwards, Gyuri Takács, the novel does not give a clear answer: the

[7] Similarly, István Margócsy reminds us of the novel's narrative solutions: "the motivated-visionary elements so dominate the narrative of action, i.e., there is no explanation of what is happening, that the reconstruction of what turns out to be the decisive scene becomes more or less impossible" (Margócsy 2001: 30).

validity of both the explicit reasons which are mainly offered from the protagonist's perspective, and also the sensed motives conveyed by references, fragmented signals and silence, all become quite uncertain in the text. In line with István Margócsy's study, which emphasizes and analyzes the mythical approach (Margócsy 2001), the description at the beginning of Chapter 20 of Dani Turi abandoning the Countess, depicts the protagonist as follows:

> His hat had shifted a bit to the side, his guba hung loosely from his shoulder, and his face glowed with the feeling of utter satisfaction. He was filled to the brim with satiation and his stomach, mouth, and heart felt so full that he desired absolutely nothing more! What were food, drink, and women to him now? What could come now after everything that had happened? He stood on the top step and looked around at the dazzling white world. He didn't blink, on the contrary, his eyes opened wide to the white whiteness of the midday sun. Let the person go blind who no longer wants to see. He shook his head and, clenching his fist, slashed his arms through the air. Like a god, to bring the world to its knees (309).

The representation of the protagonist who conquers the Countess and makes her his own – in which Dani acquires almost divine attributes – is primarily intended to convey a transcendental interpretation of the satisfaction which results from happiness. All this is closely related to the metaphorical correspondence mentioned earlier, in which for the hero (and the reader) the Countess's inaccessibility was identified with that of a goddess. In that sense, what Dani Turi did soon afterwards could be explained by the unqualifiable fulfilment of desires: the protagonist, by reaching the ultimate goal he had imagined and desired, had received everything a human could desire, so his "divine change" could be interpreted as a sign of a higher order of existence. However, it is plausible that the quoted texts primarily indicate satisfaction by using linguistic signs associated with physical needs (*He was filled to the brim with satiation; his stomach, mouth, and heart felt so full; what were food, drink, and women to him now?*), which also, as a consequence, indicates that divine greatness can be identified primarily with some destructive power (*…[he] slashed his arms through the air. Like a god, to bring the world to its knees.*) The power that comes from the supernatural state of being thus becomes devastating when he encounters the Count, when it is not only Dani Turi's exceptional bodily traits which become apparent in the description of the murder, but also the fact that the protagonist is unable to rationally control or restrain his own destructive power.[8] After summarizing the attempt to

[8] "He cast him face down and shoved his head into the snow, wringing his neck with his vice-like grip, and held the unfortune man like this until he twitched miserably, kicking his feet, floundering, and finally growing limp. (…) As though his muscles had taken on a life of their own, he began to thrust this bony weapon with rhythmic strokes into the soft, bearded, bloody and flattened head, striking and hitting, shredding the flesh from face, and

overcome human norms following the murder, Dani Turi expresses in an axiomatic way what it means for him to identify with the divine being:

> And he sensed now a hundred times over the superhuman condition of the soul that had seized him before as he'd stood at the top of the steps.
> What more could he seek down here on earth? And in his brain a thought crystallized, much like divine revelation on Mount Sinai:
> "I've eaten, I've loved, I've murdered" (314).

The naturalist-colored "summary of being" becomes truly complex in the light of the sentence that has gone before. On the basis of a comparison with the Sinai declaration, namely the Ten Commandments of Moses, Turi Dani's materialistic "programme" based on the fulfilment of physical desire acquires the same value as the basic law of Jewish/Christian ethics (with its special emphasis on the ban on murder and fornication), and thus overwrites and disregards it. In other words, paradoxically, with his divinity the protagonist intends to go beyond his own physical limitations, so that by satisfying the desire dictated by instinct, he performs the accomplishment of man's bodily needs to the utmost degree.

It is important, however, to emphasize that this interpretation is not present in the novel as a general value judgment of the narrator, but rather as a subjective narrative adapted to Dani's point of view. It is no coincidence that the narrator strongly emphasizes the difference in the way Dani perceives his position and the way the Count who encounters him sees him:

> They stood eye to eye from each other and the Count failed to notice, failed to discern the dishonorable transformation the other man's face underwent in that moment. In the mere twinkling of an eye, an entirely new man was standing before him. A fork-tongued face presented itself to him that belied every psychological truth.
> Heroism, or knavery, or the splendor of fortune had first shone forth from the peasant's countenance.
> But then a common, cunning, small-minded peasant's mug emerged from it that gazed wide-eyed at the cocked gun, not knowing what the nobleman intended with it, and wondering with simpleminded curiosity whether the other is insane and what his beef is.
> (…)
> In his eyes, too, this peasant had, from a distance and through the suggestion inspired by her [the Countess], taken on enormous stature. He'd grown larger than just any peasant, larger than just any man, greater even than all mankind, he'd risen up to the very mists in the sky.
> And yet here before him stands a small-minded, scheming, nasty dog.
> Should he raise his gun to him?

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macerating the dangling pieces of cartilage. And he struck him and hit him, and when that wasn't enough, he jumped to his feet, grasped the body by the heels with his arms, swung it, slamming the head with such force into the gate post that the skull split in two, and again he swung the damned body, smashing it against the stone wall, as though the latter were the ancient adversary he had to destroy with this despicable object of carnage, this execrable, disintegrating pillar of flesh." (312-313)

> A whip is better suited to task! A few slashes across the muzzle! Two lashes in the face, then send him away with the hussar (310-311).

The fact that the Count disregards Dani Turi and sees him merely as a peasant, can be perceived as a grievance which prompts the protagonist to murder as a retaliation. This can be articulated as one of the possible alternative interpretations that offer different explanations in which the text – in contrast to the meanings intended (specifically by Dani Turi) – offers different reasons for the murders. On the one hand, the novel emphasizes with finality the fact that it is the Count and Gyuri Takács whom the hero meets in his troubled state of mind. On the other hand, the motivation for the murder can be somewhat justified by the fact that both men can be regarded as rivals to Dani: in addition, they come into conflict with him over issues (land acquisition, desire for women) that the hero interprets as a condition for individual prosperity/happiness. Wealth and the (sexual) seduction of women are closely related in the novel as a whole. On the one hand, women in return for coexistence help the hero in farming[9]; on the other hand, Gyuri Takács' lack of manliness is not only indicated in the text by the fact that he is unable to win Erzsi Takács, Bora or anyone else, but also by his losing the Takács estates during a card game (which, moreover, Dani gives to Bora, thus humiliating his brother-in-law even more). But perhaps most of all, the validity of this analogy, which defines the whole novel, shows that Dani's intention to seduce the Countess is inseparable from his desire to acquire the Count's lands. In this context, the protagonist ultimately gains a dubious victory: the Countess does not sell the land for money but for the sake of physical love. While the protagonist had – through his sexual attractiveness – previously been able to persuade the village women to do anything, the Countess actually manipulated him, taking advantage of Dani's unquenchable desire for the unattainable strangeness manifested in the earth and woman. From this point of view, for the hero, the amorous encounter with the Countess can also be interpreted as a failure: in the absence of a detailed description, we can only assume, although it is probable, that the sexual act could not be built on the desired physical contact indicated by metaphors of gentleness and softness, but is rather an act that reveals the wildness of man. Beyond this, the fact that the cause of a double murder is closely related to the Countess (and the associated disappointment) may be reinforced by a less spectacular, but still revealing, motivational association of the text. With

[9] "He had to win over the women to this project – it was the only way to succeed where no one else would in cultivating these far-flung fields succesfully. When it came to winning women over to harvest cabbage, Dani didn't even refrain from giving hugs to the Gypsy women dwelling near the village." (33)

the seemingly unreasonable shooting down of a raven after the two murders, the text attempts – through the previously mentioned exaggerated irony – to point out that destruction is self-motivated and does not follow any rational logic:

> And again he fired. Blindly, hurriedly, thus shooting one more being, decimating yet another life. A happy life, a peaceful existence that had nothing to do with him, that had gotten in the way of his vast and swollen ego, his god-assulting power.
> And a black raven, drawing slow circles in the sky, was shattered in the air.
> Its feathers scattered, fluttering in downward spiral to the ground (315).

From the point of view of the earlier details of the novel, it is perhaps no coincidence that it is precisely a bird which becomes the suffering marker of Dani's violence. The Countess's longing for love (and for Dani) is expressed in several ways by the metaphorical (body) representations associated with the bird, which include semiotic identification based on the comparison of animal and human existence:

> She wore her blonde hair in the fashion of bourgeois ladies, in small knots, which lent her head somewhat strange bird-like appearence, and her beady eyes sparkled like those of the agile little birds, bright, moist, rash, constantly thirsting after love (116).

> The Countess closed her eyes and felt a small voluptuous shiver of disgust run through her. A rush of blood flooded her brain.
> Love had become frightfully simple to her since she'd begun taking lessons with Bora.
> Sort of life the roosters and the hens going to school together (125).

All of these, taken together, are explanations which contradict each other and are ambiguous in their attempt to explain why the fulfilment of desires cannot be seen as clearly identified with a happy (transcendental) state of existence (which, of course, is related to the motivation for the murders). This combination of possible meanings based on an interplay founded on ironic ungraspability is even more pronounced in the account of the events following the murders at the close of the novel.

The last chapter seeks to represent the mental/conscious process which occurs when the protagonist suddenly confronts what he has actually done. The experience of the uncontrollability of the body's destructive power in the unity of the previous experience is further described in this section: for Dani Turi the sense of self which accompanies his feelings of remorse and his fear of the consequences are an accompaniment to the uncontrollability of the body (similarly to what we read in the description of the Countess's death in Chapter 19):

> In that moment he raised his hand; he sensed something strange about it and looked at it. He grew pale, his eyes narrowed, and he looked at his hand with revulsion and terror; the urge to vomit assailed him, desperation and horror seized him and he thought he must fall down.

> Blood covered his hand.
> Fresh blood. Human blood.
> He shuddered with mortal dread. (…)
> The earth began to spin, he felt like he would keel over, and as though his feet were frozen to the ground, he couldn't shift his rigid legs. (…)
> It took some time for his body to pass through the first feverish wave of dread. Cold sweat covered his forehead, his torso, and he was powerless to move (317-319).

In the previous chapter, the hero's actions in the heroic spirit of a naturalist and mythical approach become ironic, not only in the mirror of the conflicting narratives of the text or in the rhetorical performance of exaggeration, but also in an explicit way: the unbreakable physical power, the unstoppable superhuman destruction disappears in a moment, and so the protagonist becomes small, and extremely human. Indeed, the text, at the other extreme, directly compares Dani Turi's behaviour to an animal state of life:

> And he quickened his steps, stricken with horror, cowering with dread, terrified that someone would pursue him, and he bent his back and tucked in his tailbone and sensed a painful tingling hounding him, chasing him down, as though he were being whipped. He was fast becoming an animal; in his brain, reason began to shut down; he stared in front of him, looking neither to right nor the left, as though wore blinders like a horse, racing forwars with machine-like steps, like an animal who, stratled at one end of the road, rushes headlong toward to other (321-322).

The narrative solutions of the ironic uncertainty of the reports are further enhanced by those statements in which Dani Turi makes various accusations and so attempts to justify the murders in a variety of contradictory ways. It is striking that these statements are not intended to explain things to others, but are rather the efforts of a protagonist who cannot understand his own actions, and who is trying to make events comprehensible to himself. Among the reasons there is an apparently rational motive ("He knew all of it, and regretted nothing; one cause lay behind it all, and he stated the cause: *My rage!…"* 317 – emphasis in the original), an attempt to blame another person, either his wife ("The thought flickered in his head that he should reproach his wife, because in point of fact it was her fault, everything was her fault, his whole ruined life was her fault." 327), or women in general ("One wife! If only one single, true woman had entered his life: he would have made her happy! But two, three, ten, a hundred… they brought him to his ruin a hundred times over" 334), or simply a declaration of innocence without any particular reasoning ("The truth appeared to him as a flash of lightning. The truth was contained in his wife's thoughts. He won't be condemned to death: *his actions were justified!*" – 329, emphasis in the original). The avoidance of responsibility, and the inability to understand himself increases the reader's distancing from the main hero; this makes it seem less and less easy to maintain the possibility of judging based on the difference in a hierarchy of

values between Dani Turi and the other characters (which was based on the assumption that through his talents and ambition, the emerging young peasant would become a prominent, and – precisely because of this – a fallen personality in the community[10]).

This is also related to the way in which in Móricz's prose there is often the possibility of redemption based on Christian repentance and the consequent spiritual cleansing, which seems to be very relevant just before the close, even though it is ultimately impossible. The confession Dani Turi makes when he returns home is received by his wife with such compassion and pity that it seems to be a forgiving love:

> And in this moment she forgot everything he'd done. The suffering she'd endured all her life, the many injuries inflicted on her, the insults, the brutality, cruelty, the all too human sins, everything, everything. What was all her suffering in comparison to this? What her atonement compared to this? (…)
> She was seized by such profound mercy that she knelt down before him, folded her hands, not even shrinking from his bloodied clothes, and with her woman's heart she summoned comfort and prayed forth words of courage! (…)
> A sort of Christian faith and love sounded in her words, causing the man to find his way back to himself (328-329).

It is no coincidence that Turi Dani himself also sees the unconditional acceptance expressed by the woman as a Savior:

> This woman now appeared to him as a Savior.
> And an overwhelming feeling of submission caused him to collapse, he fell at his wife's feet and kissed the earth before her (329).

By undertaking to commit sin and accepting punishment, the protagonist appears to regain his dignity and decides that after serving his punishment he will live a new and happy life in his family (which, as we have seen, previously appeared in the novel as a concept linked to Christian values). As a result, it seems for a moment that Dani Turi is still a figure who the reader can judge as having the ability to find value in the midst of an existence full of suffering.[11] All of which gives the impression that the

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[10] According to one of the most emblematic expressions of this interpretation, "Dani Turi does not just kill in anger, and it is not his hunger for a woman which ruins him. His hunger for a woman is not the cause but only the effect. It is the consequence of the stalled, petty and miserable life, in which there is no other satisfying space for strength and enjoyment in life, just a kiss. […] Because of the backward, underdeveloped relationships, it becomes the spark that lights the torch: instead of light, it brings fire and decay" (Czine 1960: 328).

[11] In Móricz's other works, too, a strategy of self and life interpretation as a response to suffering is also expressed (for example, in *Hét krajcár* [The Seven Pencils], partly in *Árvácska* [The Pansy], but most clearly at the end of *Légy jó mindhalálig* [Be Faithful unto Death]. It can be observed, however, that although this (writer's) interpretation is more relevant in these works, it becomes apparent that the ambiguity resulting from the rhetorical games in the texts renders the meanings somewhat uncertain.

double theme that determines the narrative of the novel, which is the debate between the anthropology of naturalism and Christian morality, is eliminated by the latter overcoming the former. In what follows, however, it turns out that all this is only an illusion: Dani Turi – just like his own self-interpretation which governs his relationship with the world and which is constantly changing throughout the whole novel – is unable to command his instincts and wildly attacks his captors when they treat Bora in a humiliating way when she pleads for his release. In the closure of the novel, therefore, the model of the achievement of desire according to Christian norms – similarly to the previous behaviour which emphasised the total satisfaction of instinct – proves to be ineffective and unsuccessful, and thus becomes part of the irony of scattered meanings which constantly question the validity of the sententious life strategies of the novel. As a result, the validity of the accusation questioning God's responsibility in the last lines is also questionable:

> What is life?
> Mud.
> And man within it?
> Gold in the mud.
> So who is at fault if nothing has become of this gold?
> "Who?"
> God, who has made nothing of it (334).

On the one hand, because of the uncertain perspective of the narrative, it is impossible to decide whether these words should be read as the subjective comments of Dani Turi or general statements by the narrator. On the other hand, Krisztián Benyovszky has pointed out that *mud* and *gold*, which play a decisive role in the metaphorical construction of meaning, is part of a semantic game of ungraspable and multiple meanings: while the two concepts point to a contradiction based on a value hierarchy (in which the mud marks the worthless, the small, while gold is the valued, the ideal), in the course of the story this dichotomy frequently does not apply consistently in terms of its features of meaning (Benyovszky 2010). In this sense, the somewhat didactic-seeming last lines of the novel point to a conviction that warns the reader that the various strategies for interpreting life are built on opposites, and on a continuously ironizing movement which excludes unambiguous truths regarding the unstable relationships between people.

In the light of this, it can be stated that, as we have already emphasized in the introduction, in Móricz's oeuvre *Gold in the Mud* is a novel which is both highly significant and possessing great originating power. It prepares the questions that almost all of Móricz's prose repeatedly returns to as problems, not only on a thematic level (such as the analysis of the power

relations intricately intermingled within marriages and love affairs, or critical accounts of the various intuitive, anthropological explanations for the eradication of suffering), but also by creating the narrative language which, despite its sententious profusion of examples, makes a commitment to the varied nature of written expression and to multiple interpretations. In addition, it is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that *Gold in the Mud* is also one of the most emblematic of Móricz's works, because the representation of the various experiences of the body influenced not only the writer's oeuvre but also the later evolution of modern Hungarian prose.

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