

DESCRIPTION AS SELF-REFLECTION IN ZSIGMOND JUSTH'S *MŰVÉSZ SZERELEM*¹

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This paper focuses on a forgotten Hungarian author's forgotten novel. Zsigmond Justh's *Művész szerelem* [Artist's Love] was published in 1888 and considered to be a "styleroman", because a number of artistic styles meet in the landscapes it depicts, involving the basic changes in literature from realism to impressionism, Art Nouveau, symbolism, and naturalism. This study examines these descriptive parts of the novel because they provide a peculiar type of self-reflection. The analysis starts with the description of a character's appearance which can be conceived as a narrative representation of portraiture. Then two narrated landscapes reflecting on their own compositions are examined. The aim of the paper is to establish that most of the descriptive parts have the same function in the novel: they denaturalize the spectacle, representing a created visual structure which refers to the text itself, and builds on a narrative mechanism disavowing the realistic illusion. Finally, the analysis concludes that description can be regarded as *mise en abyme* in the novel because the descriptive parts illustrate the priority of the artist's subjectivity in art just as the whole novel realises this aesthetical idea as well.

Keywords: Hungarian literature, nineteenth-century novel, Zsigmond Justh, self-reflection, description, *mise en abyme*, focalization

Zsigmond Justh is considered as a forgotten author of nineteenth-century Hungarian literature. His social efforts to modernize Hungarian society and his ambitious activity to institutionalize the cultural life of the country were appreciated by following generations, but the place of his literary works has been a subject of controversy. Some novels of Justh's planned tetralogy entitled *A kiválás genezise*, edited by András Diószegi in the 1960s, illustrate the idea of his social reforms: mix together the bloodlines of the land labourers and the aristocracy. Justh's writings were often criticised on account of their ideological aspects, that is, that his ideas of reform oppress the esthetical value of his novels.

Zsigmond Justh wanted to be both a productive reformer and a modern writer, who tried to renew the traditional narrative forms based on Petőfi's and Arany's folkloristic language.² As a reformer, Justh's aim was to encourage the growth of a

talented, well-informed, ambitious national reform-aristocracy who have clear and efficient principles on the social, political and economic modernization of Hungary. He founded a Debating Society based on the British example in order to cultivate Hungarian magnates. Once or twice a week they had meetings, with 15–20 members present, and gave presentations on various fields of natural sciences, literature, the arts, and politics, then discussed these presentations and other current problems, and concluded the meeting with musical performances.

Another of Justh's projects was the Society of Maecenas on the model of French Salons. He managed to persuade Mrs. Csáky, the wife of the Minister of Culture, to open the first salon. Their goal was to produce flourishing cultural life in Hungary forged by a deep social contact between artists and the aristocracy. Later, he had a theatre built on his property, where peasants performed classical and contemporary plays. Besides these projects, he spent most of his unfortunately brief life trying to introduce Hungarian literature in Europe, especially in the Francophone territories.

The reception of Justh's writings was reignited by the critics of *Nyugat* in the early 1940s.³ Some critics underestimated his novels and short stories, but praised his *Journal* for its historiocultural values;⁴ others did not find his oeuvre significant.⁵ András Diószegi (*Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* [Literary history], 1960/6) and Imre Bori⁶ rediscovered Zsigmond Justh as a lovable figure of Hungarian literary history, whose efforts had died as his generation had lost the courage necessary for reforms.

Művész szerelem [Artist's Love] can be regarded as a peculiar exception among Justh's illustrative novels. This essay will aim to highlight the literary values of this forgotten novel, which was originally published in 1888, because it represents a self-referential type of the modern novel at the end of the nineteenth century. This self-referential way of narration can be found on three levels in *Művész szerelem*: formal, thematical and structural reflection are all at work between the novel and its characters' creative process. The descriptive parts of *Művész szerelem* provide a peculiar type of textual mirroring, because they involve the whole subject of the book. It ought to be mentioned that criticism based on the theory of description set out from the relevant descriptive elements of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* and defined their function as a fundamental attribute of early modernism.⁷ Sándor Márai was the only one who noticed some similarity between Proust's and Justh's works.⁸ This essay tries to reveal the self-referential aspect of the descriptive parts in Justh's *Művész szerelem* and also to point out that Justh attempted to follow the narrative technical devices of the *fin-de-siècle* and adopt them into Hungarian literature. These efforts probably were not in vain.

Formal and Thematical Level

The characters in *Művész szerelem* are artists almost without exception. One of them, Arzén Gilády is working on his new novel based on a specific aesthetical program:

The whole is a modern love story. I would like to show how we obey the eternal law, which keeps the world going. I want to point out the influence of science and intellectual development on love. I want to point out how the mental progress weakens love. The construction of the novel itself follows the requirements of our age: short, fitting strictly to its subject without any redundancy.⁹

Arzén's final conclusion would be that people are not able to be in love in his age, because a modern artist can not have any relation with the transcendence from where, according to him, love comes. Arzén's ideas are derived on one hand from the theory of evolution, on the other hand from the feeling of the *maladie de fin-de-siècle*, the generational depression caused by the idea of determination and the fall of the positivist world-concept. The final conclusion of *Művész szerelem* is also that the *fin-de-siècle* man is not able to be in love, because Arzén is so obsessed with the analysis that his relationship with Paula becomes governed by his writing process and by his artistic endeavours to create a life-like heroine. In the end he completes his novel but loses his lover.

The artist as a literary character can be regarded as an attribute in Justh's oeuvre. Arzén Gilády (*Művész szerelem*), Gábor Szeghalmy (*Az utolsó hangulat*) or Lipót Czobor – modelled on László Mednyánszky, a Hungarian painter and Justh's friend (*Fuimus*) – are the most characteristic ones. They are symbols of self-destructive sensibility, which gives people a more profound cognition of life.¹⁰ According to Péter Pór's interpretation, the figure of the artist in Justh's novels does not fit in with the *fin-de-siècle* scheme of art contra life, but the artist's fate is to realise an extraordinary and self-destructive life. The characters like Arzén Gilády are victims of consistent self-analysis. Pór states that this kind of artist concept with its more intellectual conclusion is more sensitive than that of Justh's contemporaries. In Justh's novels, a situation determines the plot in the cross-point of an Existence-Love-Art triangle representing the world through an artist's eyes. Pór shows that Justh creates "illustrative novels" by elaborating an idea of art and creative process, and the love story is just the framing of narrative.

Imre Bori in his essay¹¹ emphasises the formal concept of the novel; Justh follows his subject thoroughly, without deviations from the plot. The comparison is obvious: the conclusion of Arzén's novel is the same as the result of Justh's story; the subject matters of the novels are also the same (analysing the hero's psyché), and we must not neglect to take notice that Justh accepts Arzén's formal requirements in his novel as well.¹²

Structural Level

Zsigmond Justh's book, *Művész szerelem* can be conceived as a novel of aesthetical disputes. A romantic painter and an impressionist artist discuss aesthetical theories of art with a naturalist, analyst writer. Ernő, the romantic painter creates historical paintings, in accordance with his opinion that only vast, monumental compositions have a great importance in the arts. In his point of view, "the artist who paints Socrates' head is of higher quality than those who daub a ripe water-melon on canvas"¹³ (40). For him, the aim of an artist is to delight the spectators' eye, and only the dignity of the subject can have an influence on people. Paula's favorite artists are the Flemish painters, as she appreciates the paintings representing workers or people's everyday life. She detests Ernő's work because of the lack of realistic "historical opium". Paula's paintings represent impressions by fine colours and tender tones. She refuses a didactic message when it comes to art and proclaims the idea of l'art pour l'art. In his novels Arzén Gilády tries to analyse the human psyché based on an actual living person. He examines Paula's reactions, motivations, and activities. Arzén and Paula agree that Ernő's historical paintings are not modern without subjective elements; moreover, he constructs a false image of reality. Everything that can be declared as modern in this novel seems to be under the influence of the artist's subjectivity. In his essay¹⁴ György Bodnár states that *Művész szerelem* declares the autonomous existence of an artwork, because this idea conquers the artist-character's polemia. This paper is going to examine how the descriptive parts realise the character's theory of art.

Justh's Aesthetical Taste

The idea of priority of the artist's subjectivity can be found in Justh's *Párizsi Napló* [Parisian Journal]. Justh visited Paris for the first time in 1882, and he became a popular figure of French salons and artistdom at once. Due to his regular travels to Paris, he became known as a Hungarian artist with an exotic image of the "puszta". Justh also became acquainted with celebrities: Sarah Bernard, Hypolite Taine, Paul Bourget, Karl-Joris Huysmans, Anatole France, Barbey d'Aurevilly, and because of his noble origins he was a well-known guest of the most important salons and cafés.

In 1888 he had written "half notes" about his Parisian lifestyle, which would be published after more than half a century as *Párizsi Napló*. Justh's reputation was so high in Paris at the time that some extracts of these notes and his letters were published in French as well.¹⁵ In his *Journal* Justh mentioned the pre-Raphaelite painters. He came to know two pre-Raphaelite artists, R. W. Bunny and G. F.

Carry Elwes, whose paintings he found very similar to Doré's or Puvis de Chavannes' works. He writes about them as follows:

Both are under influence of the pre-Raphaelite era. Their poets: Swinburn, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Their painters: (among the old masters) the Primitives: Giotto, Fra Angelico, Bellini, and the Spanish school, Leonardo da Vinci and Titian's portraits. Tout à fait mon affaire ça! [...] Both are Laurent's students.¹⁶

Justh wanted to have his *Journal* published with Bunny's and Elwes' portrait of him on the cover. He also remarks that he prefers Moreau's paintings to canvases in the academic style. Justh's reports on Madame Ayen's salon where he found 60 paintings by "one of the most refined and diseased painters of the most subtle age".¹⁷ Justh considers the *Vision of Salome* as Moreau's masterpiece.

Justh visited the Primitive's paintings in the Louvre twice, and he appreciated Besnar's and Puvis de Chavannes' compositions because of their colourful effects. Katalin Gellér's study¹⁸ on the relevancies of the fine arts in Justh's *Párizsi Napló* reveals that the first trends of symbolism, which agreed at some points with romantic historicism and with the renewed classicistic tendency attracted Justh's attention in Paris. The other important element of his interest is mysticism. His Russian friend, Antokolsky's personality embodied the mixture of mysticism and the Primitives for him.¹⁹

Justh also states that the most impressive element of a painting is the artist himself (*Párizsi Napló* 135), and declares that an artist has to be "interested in life only through his own emotional experience"²⁰ (*Hazai Napló* 449–450). That's why it is not so surprising that Justh preferred his friend's, László Mednyánszky's paintings to the world-famous Mihály Munkácsy's popular works. The difference between the two artists seems to be of a very great importance; Munkácsy's compositions were being sold all over the world, and as he had moved to Paris to participate in French salon-life intensely, he became beloved by all there. Munkácsy's historical paintings and famous trilogy of Christ's Passion won him real fame. In his *Journal*, Justh complains that Munkácsy forgot his native language, but he had not learned proper French either, that his works are vast without "philosophical depth", and not modern at all. Justh condemns him for his decorative salon-paintings and advises him to paint landscapes (*Párizsi Napló*, notes in April 1888).

As opposed to Munkácsy, Mednyánszky was of aristocratic origin; and he represented the last generation of his family. The Justh-family of Nécspál also derived its origin from the twelfth century. Zsigmond Justh had been born in Szenttornya on the land inherited from his mother's side (as he wrote in his *Hazai Napló*). In spite of all the intensive relationship with the magnates, the family did not belong to the aristocracy, but they were wealthy gentry.²¹ In *Hazai Napló* Justh regularly wrote about his relatives, mainly about his cousins, Ferenc and György, with

whom he visited Necpál, the ancient family nest and one of the properties the family had possessed since 1273. The country-house was owned by a Lutheran branch of the family: a Révay–Justh couple. Zsigmond Justh mentions in his *Journal* that this it is the thirteenth marriage between the two ancient families. He regarded the different generations of his own family as a series of degenerations infected with the noble disease caused by intermarriage with close relatives and featuring suicidal descendants. The personal experience of being the last generation of a traditional noble family contributed to Justh's idea of social reform through regeneration by intermarriage between peasants and aristocrats.

Justh appreciated Mednyánszky's paintings because they represented human poverty and sorrow. Mednyánszky took his themes from the world of coachmen, charcoal-burners, fishermen, sailors and shepherds. He collected criminals and vagabonds around himself, he lived among them. His homosexuality turned his sensibility toward people on the margin of society. Mednyánszky and Justh had similar theories of Hungary's national problems, and they drew attention to the values of Hungarian peasant culture. Furthermore, both of them were probably members of a theosophical association following Chevilon's ideas.²² Justh in *A Hét* praised his friend, and wrote that "he is one of the deepest painters among our artists and because of this, the most difficult to understand".²³ In this article Justh emphasized Mednyánszky's mysticism as well.

Mysticism, pre-Raphaelite's visionariness, and Mednyánszky's sensibility for suffering are the markers of the territory where Justh's aesthetical taste can be revealed. Besides, his interest focused mainly on the artist's personality, which takes priority in art.

Description as Narrative

The yellowish tone of desolate scenery was refracted in places by some girls in colourful kerchiefs collecting violets, or by some old grannies dressed in the colour of mortality carying with a stoop their bundles of woods on their way to home.

– Oh, God, how sorrowful is everything here! – said Arzén.

– Very impressive! Let's see how a beautiful picture would be made by that granny with the woods on her back, yellow on yellow just like an eau forte.²⁴ (175–176)

One topic, but two narrated paintings occur in description quoted above. Paula and Arzén give two different aesthetical (and ethical) points of view for the same subject: poverty. The scenery provides an impression for Arzén, but Paula produces a picture of it. Both of them try to avoid regarding Nature as Nature, but instead, they try to create a landscape by using the terms of the arts. The expressions

like “yellowish tone”, or “desolate scenery was refracted” refer to an impressionist painting dominated by the colours of violet and black (the colour of mortality), representing people in Nature. Paula takes further steps towards the denaturalization of description: she imagines an etching (eau forte) in yellow. The two viewers see the same scenery in two different artificial ways, but neither of their perspectives refers to “real Nature.” They set a narrated picture as an object of art for the reader, who in this way is expected to focus on the process of description instead of the scenery. Mieke Bal uses the term of “de-naturalized description”²⁵ concerning Proust’s descriptive parts in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, in which the characters are represented not in a real way, but in artificial forms due to the fragmental and photographic narrative devices. Examining late-modern fiction Bal finds that the meta-deictic function is very common in their discursive form: “This is a complex, rather than a simple order, in which the elements refer not to the described object but to description.” Regarding our example in *Művész szerelem*, it tends to follow this modernist aspect of self-referential description. But what is exactly description itself? How can we separate it from the other parts of a text?

Description versus Narration?

The first definitions of description lead us to ancient Greek theoretical works: Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Plato’s *Republic*. Gérard Genette compares these definitions and establishes that both theoreticians defined description as a reduced, restricted mode of literary representation: “... description can be conceived independently of narration, but practically we can find it hardly ever liberated from it, narration itself cannot exist without description, nevertheless this dependence still takes the first place constantly.”²⁶ Philippe Hamon draws on the history of European reflection on description in his famous work.²⁷ He states that in literary history the majority of theoreticians deemed dramatized description of Achilles’ shield by Homer as the proper type of description. Description (descriptif) remained in this way a subordinate form opposite to narrative for centuries.

The referential fallacy, the outworn heritage of classical theory is “the reason alleged for narrative’s negatively judged arresting of time is based not on discourse but on its referents”.²⁸ Due to this referential context of description the narrative theory traditionally defined it as a “boundary of narrative”. However, description purely separated from narration can hardly be found. As Marc Eli Blanchard notes, the contextual indications of time and place, and the milieu in which the characters evolve would be considered as extraneous to the narrative itself. Whilst this would be regarded as description, the core of the narrative would be the narration. The line between them is difficult to trace, and supposedly is

imaginative. In fact, narration proper may not exist at all. That is why – as Blanchard argues –

... in almost any narrative a descriptive intention or attitude on part of the narrator which can be reconstructed by the reader and whose signs and significance, if properly assessed, will stimulate our imagination and satisfy our unconscious need for appropriation and recognition.²⁹

In this sense, the descriptive process of manipulation as a masking of existing narrative process works in the literary text. Mieke Bal looks further when she declares that the function of description can stimulate a subversive reading process.³⁰ She emphasises the context of description and elaborates an integrated descriptive model for the analysis of description. Genette affirms, as concerning the representational modes of narrative, to narrate an event and to describe an object are similar operations activating the same sources of language. Therefore, description is not a specific mode of language, but one of its aspects, or its certain point of view.

In the twentieth century description can be conceived as the place of rewriting, as a function of intertextuality, as a way of conservation, or as a practical exemplum of our knowledge about words and things, as Hamon asserts when he adverts to the role of description in *nouveau roman*. Marc Eli Blanchard refers to Hamon's thoughts when he writes:

... description is the way in which we must use language if we want to reflect upon its models. In this sense, the descriptive function in language is a very special one indeed: it is not only a referring or denoting one. It is the only one which enables us to identify a piece of information both as redundant [...] and as pertinent [...]. In other words, there is in a description something like surplus value, an aura which glorifies narrative discours and makes it more noticeable.³¹

The Reception of Descriptive Parts

Justh's first collection of short stories was published in 1887 while some earlier essays and the novel *Ádám* remained in manuscript until 1941. This volume *Káprázatok* [Illusions] and *Művész szerelem* were criticised severely by Justh's contemporaries, Elek Gozsdu, Jenő Rákosi, Jenő Péterfy, for Bourget's strong influence on them. Justh cut these out and made notes on them, which shows his sensibility towards negative criticism.³² Although Justh's later works are of greater importance, in the reception of his oeuvre some critical essays esteem these earlier writings more. Greist Georgia Lenart examines the influence of French Natural-

ism on Hungarian novels focusing on the contemporary reactions to Hungarian naturalists like Sándor Bródy and Zsigmond Justh: “Some critics recognized Justh’s talent and could agree with Bródy’s evaluation in *A Hét* that Justh wrote ‘the most complicated and difficult half notes’ in Hungarian literature, but others were highly judgemental and saw only the imitator in the young writer.”³³ Jenő Péterffy’s book review criticized Justh’s *Káprázatok* most severely. Péterffy, a well-known authority on literary criticism, blames Justh’s attitude of servile imitation of the fashionable tendencies, and for his “Hamlet-perfumed mawbish, affected style”, which seems to be dishonest and manneristic.³⁴ Justh never denied that he had begun to write on Taine’s advice his first critical essay on Bourget in 1885.³⁵

When *Művész szerelem* was published in 1888 it also encountered controversial reception. “A couple of things come to my mind about my remote land, the ‘warm’ reception of my new book”³⁶ – Justh complained to his friend, Antokolsky, the Russian painter in *Párizsi napló*. Although *Művész szerelem* was almost put to silence by Hungarian critics, one reviewer took notice of its descriptive elements (*Magyar Bazár* 1888/7), and appreciated their beauty. In the 1940s Gábor Halász claimed that one attribute of modernism can be revealed in Justh’s early writings, when all types of arts have an effect at the same time: the novel paints visually, the picture narrates, the actor moves like a figure on the painting. Although Elemér Császár in his literary history points out that Justh sacrificed the harmony of the whole for his perfect fragments,³⁷ the critics of the 1980s emphasized his impressionist descriptive fragmental writings. György Bodnár places Justh’s early novels in the Hungarian literary canon when he declares that the descriptive elements of his novels represent the impressionist style playing an important role in narration.³⁸ Adopting András Diószegi’s idea, Imre Bori (*Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 1960/6) claims that Justh paints plain-air pictures of Budapest when he describes scenes. “When he depicts, it seems that he changes his pen, because his statements and analyses are dryer, more unpoetical with inelegancies of the style. So his landscapes are against the traditional forms.”³⁹ According to Bori’s opinion, a number of artistic styles meet in Justh’s depicted landscapes: impressionism, Art Nouveau, symbolism, and naturalism. That is why *Művész szerelem* is known as a “styleroman” involving the basic changes from the 1880s: a protest against the traditional narrative forms of realism.⁴⁰

Portraits and Landscapes

Landscapes are just as frequent as portraits in the novel. When the narrator depicts Arzén’s appearance, it seems to be a narrative representation of portraiture:

The sunshine of Spring illuminated all of his figure. His face reminded one of Byzantin icons painted on a golden background. His long profile, his narrow, almond-shaped eyes, his thin, long, dangling arms and long nose could have looked stylised, but his eyes showed faint, refined sensuality and deep feeling.⁴¹ (10)

The narrator represents Arzén's personality by a portrayal referring to the artificial decadent representation of beauty. Imre Bori establishes the influence of pre-Raphaelite tendency and Art Nouveau in this narrated portrait. We can find more portrayals in the novel, like the descriptions of Eliza's (24) or Paula's appearance (56). In these portraits the female characters are seen from the narrator's perspective, and this way the narrator plays a part in the narrative as a focalizer. Mieke Bal argued that focalizers "can be embedded characters whose point of view the narrational voice adopts and, in free indirect discourse, even absorbs to the point of confusion. But the focalizers can also be the diffused ideologies or doxa that the speaking subject would like to disavow, as well as the speaker's unconscious views, fantasies, and preoccupations."⁴² In *Művész szerelem*, portraits and landscapes in general are represented by the narrator, but the focalizer is not the narrator at any time. The narrational voice adopts different characters' points of view dominating the description, and these views control the elements of descriptive parts. In description the focalizer has a motivation for regarding his/her object; an opening door offering the view, or a ray of light glimmering through the window. As regards to Arzén's portrait, the "sunshine" gives motivation for the narrator to represent Arzén's appearance; the narrator depicts Arzén as the sunshine is illuminating all his figure, which reminds him of a painted icon or of a stylised picture. The description of Arzén's faces is not a realistic representation of his appearance but an ekphrasis of a visual portrait, which denaturalizes the depicted character drawing attention to its artifact quality.

According to Marc Eli Blanchard, description is a system that enables us to modify a common frame of reference and to introduce our own view of the world, even as it makes us share in an essentially *visual* experience, "... the purpose of a description is not to make us see the place of the action, so that, we might be able to juxtapose our understanding of it with our understanding of the action itself."⁴³ Roland Barthes⁴⁴ also emphasises the visual aspect of description. According to him, every literary description is a view. We can say, that the enunciator (l'énonciateur) settles himself/herself near the window before describing, not only to get view, but to find what he/she can see by the frame itself: embrasure creates the spectacle. In *Művész szerelem* most of the descriptive parts have the same function: they denaturalize the spectacle, representing an artificial created picture, which refers not to "Nature" but to the text itself. Some descriptions have a frame, or a situation of the viewer, which transforms the visual experience into the work

of art. The following example may prove this self-referential function representing not portraiture but landscape.

On the occasion of an excursion to Tétény (138–140), the narrator depicts the banks of the Danube. “The sharply lightened bank” provides motivation for description: the colours of the landscape (the light green of gleaming waves, the black contours of a fishing boat, the sober colours by greyish smoke) evoke the image of an impressionist landscape. This image is supported by expressions concerning the fine arts: richly coloured picture, background covered by grayish smoke, bridge like a huge black band breaking the greenish blue of the transparent sky, or white houses mottled the greenfield. Although the reader realises the landscape by putting the details of the picture together, not only as a spatial factor, but a temporal one also influences the view. As the boat is passing on the river new elements of the landscape appear: “here and there”, “appeared”, “emerged”, and “rode along the water” mark the changing of the space in vision so that the description is primarily cinematic. At least three times we can realize zoom-effects in the depicted vision giving a closer view of different scenes, like a wedding couple in a village, grapewine yards, or gardens with geraniums and daisies. This way, the whole structure of description is built on a narrative mechanism disavowing the realistic illusion.

Mise en Abyme as Description

The two descriptions below can highlight the peculiar self-referential mode in Justh’s novel.

1.

Arzén’s gaze runs over the scenery of town park. He is the focalizer, but description is narrated by the narrator’s voice. First, the motivation for description can be demonstrated: “He perceived the landscape, and forgot Anne for a minute.” Arzén gets impressions from Nature, but he is simultaneously regarding the view lying before him in a denaturalized way:

...Their blackish trunks were lining the light background of the green field. Here and there, tiny, bursting leaves of a big willow or poplar painted points of green in the light, transparent azure of the sky. The lawn was dotted by dark violet lillies and white daisies. Light, hardly sensible odour was spreading in the air. In some bushes song-bird was heard modestly in a low voice, because he might get frightened by people’s distant murmuring, or maybe in order to bring his voice in harmony with the fine drawing of bushes, trees, and lawn⁴⁵ (10–11).

Certain details of description above involve the terms of the arts: blackish trunks were lining the light background, tiny points of green leaves in the light, transparent azure of the sky, the lawn was dotted by dark violet. An impressionist landscape is narrated here with its pointilist technique and light contours, but it comprises sensory elements as well. The effect of voices and smells also makes impression: “modestly in a low voice”, “people’s murmuring”, “sensible odour of lillies and daisies”, and the like.

Although it is the narrator who depicts the landscape, Arzén’s point of view provides the centre of focalization. Gérard Genette draws up a typology of focalization⁴⁶ and he defines the focalization as a narrative segment that is not permanent in the course of narration. The internal focalization is a presentation of events restricted to the point of view of one or more focal characters; it is *fixed* if the focalization is restricted to a simple character, *variable* if the focalization is between several focal characters, and *multiple* if the presentation of the same events is seen through several focal characters. Genette’s typology was commented and criticized by many theoreticians in consideration of the confusion between focalization and narration in connection with the terms of mood and voice.⁴⁷

According to Mieke Bal, every narrative enunciation contains a focalizer and a focalized object. When a place is represented by a visual image, the narrator describes what he/she can see, or he/she could see when he/she was younger. This provides a peculiar importance to the subject of the view which Bal designates by the term *focalization*.⁴⁸ It “establishes the link of perception between subject and object. Ascending in body, the focalizer descends in vision”.⁴⁹

In the description quoted above the motivation (“he perceived the landscape”) is the moment when the narrator transfers the power of focalization to the character. Focalization is fixed because it became restricted to Arzén’s point of view. The visual image of town park is becoming artificial through Arzén’s eye. The explicit allusion to an impressionist painting creates the frame of description which enables the reader to identify the description as a work of art. Therefore, the elements of description are forming an ekphrasis reflecting on its own composition.

2.

This, this is modern! These factory chimnies lining the grayish-blue sky dirty with smoke and steam, the wet and fummy suburban air which softens the contours and makes the picture mysterious and tender, those bloomy, transparent colours... here and there a line, bright green, a perfect blur! Then those huge striking brick-red announcements over there at the corner... and the people, these workers wearing gray and blue jackets ... All remind me to my favourite painters, the Flamish masters ... We have to paint this ...⁵⁰ (92–93).

Paula builds her landscape by pictorial elements: chimnies lining the grayish-blue sky, the contours, mysterious and tender picture, bright green line, a perfect blur, and so on. She regards the spectacle as the model of modern art. Paula stands on a tramway leaning against its side to see the view. She says with full of enthusiasm: "It's the outset of modern landscape! This is what I am feeling!" (92) The situation frames the description and creates the perspective of Paula's point of view. She sees the scenery from above. First, her gaze wanders away into the distance when she is regarding the chimnies and grayish-blue sky dirty with smoke and steam. Then she is looking at the whole "mysterious and tender picture" in all. It is followed by a zoom-effect: the announcement at the corner on the wall, and workers wearing gray and blue jackets. The view from the tramway is intentionally represented as a painting because Paula wants to see this view as a work of art to demonstrate for her company what a modern landscape should be like.

Paula's *ars poetica* is based on impressionist style. When she is the focal character, description is always dominated by narrated impressionist elements; in this way, the subjecticist idea "What you feel put on the canvas!" (39, 68) is illustrated in the text. In the novel the descriptive parts occasionally illustrate the focalizers' aesthetical taste. The description of the Central Railway Station (52–53) is a good example for this device. The picture of the railway station is narrated through the naturalist writer's eye: microrealistical effects of voices, noises, rustles ("shuffling steps" "dying song", "rough laugh", "ringing of tramways", "wheels of rolling cars")⁵¹ express how busy and noisy a railway station could be. At the same time, the romantic painter Ernő is watching the same scene as a delighted landscape of an alpine scenery.

When Paula's point of view controls the description (45, 92–93, 95, 175), the narrative is dominated by expressions of shades of colours, tones and impressions. She declares: "it is strange, how sometimes some landscapes... and some voices can express our impressions"⁵² (117). We can conceive this phrase as a *mise en abyme* of descriptive parts in the novel: Paula's declaration draws the reader's attention to the process of how descriptive parts are being built in the text. They illustrate the focal characters' personality, which can not be separated from their aesthetical ideas in the context of aesthetical disputes.

Mieke Bal examines a type of description that can be considered as *mise en abyme*, or mirroring text, because the significance of the metaphor going through the description includes the whole subject of the novel.⁵³ In this sense, the descriptive parts in *Művész szerelem* can be regarded as *mise en abyme*, because they involve the whole subject of the novel, that is the aesthetical disputes between different artistic movements (impressionism, romanticism, and naturalism) demonstrating the focalizer's theory of art. In this way, landscape and portraits illustrate the priority of the artist's personality in art. *Mise en abyme* can be regarded as a form of self-reflection "when a part of a text states something about the whole text

itself, highlighting it or interpreting it, like a little mirror, which is sometimes imperceptible, mirroring quasi inwards.⁵⁴ In Justh's novel there is no mirror text, because we cannot read Arzén Gilady's novel: we are just informed about the process of it being written. Despite the lack of embedded text we can point out the thematical reflexivity between Arzén's formal and thematical conceptions and its realisation in *Művész szerelem*. This reflexivity requires retrospective reading of the text. Reflexivity suggests that Justh's novel supposedly is the same as Arzén's novel, which means a virtual homonymy between a character and author. Besides these self-referential levels the descriptive parts also provide a mirroring aspect. A kind of pictorial view appears on different levels in the novel. When Arzén describes people he uses pictorial terminology: Ernő, his best friend "remains pure gold" during his analytical process (35), "he sees the contours of arts, just like those of people. Some descriptions are metaphorical like the one in which the Danube would be the border between past and future in era of the Hungarian Millennium (138–140); others refer to descriptions themselves involving denaturalized elements to construct an ekphrasis sometimes according to the focal character's aesthetical taste. This way, the priority of the subjectivist idea demonstrates the subject matter of the novel.

Művész szerelem is an exception among Justh's "illustrative novels", the role of descriptive parts can be conceived as a modern technical device in European fiction at the end of the nineteenth century. Seeing that *Művész szerelem* is a forgotten author's forgotten novel, its literary values provide further possibilities to criticism.

Notes

- ¹ Zsigmond Justh, *Művész szerelem* [Artist's Love]. Budapest: Pallas, 1888.
- ² Gábor Gángó's postscript in *A pénz legendája és más kisregények* [The legend of money and other novels]. Budapest: Unikornis, 2000.
- ³ László Bóka's, Endre Illés's, and Gábor Halász' essays in *Nyugat*.
- ⁴ Gábor Halász discovered Justh's *Journal* and had it published in the 1940s. His essays are very significant in Justh's reception (*Magyar századvég*, 1937; *Magyar álmódók*, 1939; *Justh Párizsban*, 1941). György Bodnár, on the other hand, preferred Justh's short novels (*Új Auróra* 1987/3).
- ⁵ Béla G. Németh, *Szemközt egy legendával* [Face to face with a legend], in *Századutóról-századelőről* [End of the century, beginning of the century], Budapest: Magvető, 1959.
- ⁶ Imre Bori, *Varáslók és mákvirágok* [Magicians and poppies]. Újvidék: Fórum Könyvkiadó, 1979, 122–267; his essay on *Művész szerelem*, In: *Prózatörténeti tanulmányok* [Studies in the History of Prose]. Budapest, 1993.
- ⁷ The most important works are: G. Genette, *Figures III*. Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1972; G. Genette, *Nouveau discours du récit*, Paris: Seuil, 1983; Paul deMan, *Allegories of Reading*, New Heaven–London: Yale University Press, 1979; A. Compagnon, *Proust entre deux siècles*, Paris: Seuil, 1989; Mieke Bal, *Images littéraires ou Comment lire visuellement Proust*, Québec: XYZ éditeur, 1997.

- ⁸ Sándor Márai realised that they both worked in the same conditions with the same sensibility and with only a decade separating them from each other. Both of them were wealthy, and suffered from incurable illness, and Justh's *Journal of Paris* mirrors the same social milieu and the same atmosphere as Proust's novels. See: Sándor Márai, "A dandy és világa", in *Pesti Hírlap* 1941/33.
- ⁹ Zsigmond Justh, *Művész szerelem*, Budapest: Pallas, 1888, 180. "Egy modern szerelem története az egész. Meg szeretném mutatni, hogyan engedelmessé válnak ma annak az örök törvénynek, amely fenntartja a világot. Ki akarom mutatni a tudás, az intellektuális fejlődés hatását a szerelemre. Ki akarom mutatni, hogyan gyöngíti a szerelmet a szellemi előrehaladás. Maga a regény formája megfelel a század követelményeinek; rövid, és szorosan tárgyához ragaszkodik; kitérések nincsenek benne." The quoted texts in this essay are translated by the author.
- ¹⁰ Péter Pór, *Konzervatív reformtörekvések a századforduló irodalmában* [Conservative efforts at reform in the literature of the turn of the century]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971.
- ¹¹ Imre Bori, "Justh Zsigmond." In Bori, *Varázlók és mákvirágok*.
- ¹² Imre Bori highlighted this concurrence in *Prózatörténeti tanulmányok*.
- ¹³ "... magasabb rendű művész az, ki Socrates fejét festi meg, mint aki egy érett görögdiányét mázsol" (40).
- ¹⁴ György Bodnár, "Tételek között szorongó tárgyiaság és impresszionizmus: Justh Zsigmond" [Objectivity and Impressionism trapped among precepts], *Új Auróra* [New Aurora], 1987/3: 68–78.
- ¹⁵ *Journaux intimes et cornets* publié par *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (Paris) 1975: 5–18; Condeberque-Lrecht. "Le journal parisien de Sigismond Justh Un ami de ma jeunesse", *Nouvelle revue de Hongrie* (Budapest), avril 1940: 264–273.
- ¹⁶ *Justh Zsigmond naplója és levelei*. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1977, 59–60. "Mind a kettő a preraffaelisztikus éra hatása alatt. Költőik: Swinburn, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Festőik: (régiek közül) a primitívek: Giotto, Fra Angelico, Bellini, azután a spanyol iskola és Leonardo da Vinci és Tizian arcképei. Tout à fait mon affaire ça! [Ez nekem is teljesen megfelel!] Mind a ketten Laurens tanítványai."
- ¹⁷ *Párizsi napló*, 211: "a legszubtilisabb kor legrafináltabb s legbetegebb festője".
- ¹⁸ Katalin Gellér, "Justh Zsigmond Párizsi naplójának képzőművészeti vonatkozásai" [Artistic aspects of Zsigmond Justh's Parisian journal], *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* [Art History News] 1983/4.
- ¹⁹ Justh describes Antokolsky's atelier in this context in *Párizsi Napló* (23, 82, 112–113).
- ²⁰ "az, akit csak saját érzésvilágán keresztül érdekel az élet".
- ²¹ András Tóth, "Justh Zsigmond naplója és levelei" [The journal and letters of Zsigmond Justh]. *Irodalomtörténet* [Literary History] 1979/3: 673–678.
- ²² *Mednyánszky László naplója*. Budapest: Képzőművészeti Alap Kiadóvállalata, 1960.
- ²³ Catalogue of Mednyánszky exhibition in the Hungarian National Gallery – Erzsébet Király, 'A "komor szépség" festője', in *Mednyánszky kiállítása a Magyar Nemzeti Galériában 2003–2004*. Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 2003. (A Magyar Nemzeti Galéria kiadványai 2003/4). – "A legmélyebb s egyúttal a legnehezebben érthető festőink között."
- ²⁴ "A kihalt táj sárgás tónusát csak itt-ott törte meg egy-egy tarka kendős, ibolya-szedő leány, vagy egy-egy a múlás színeibe öltözött öreg anyó, kik meggörnyedve cipelték rőzse-kötegeiket hazafelé.
– Istenem, milyen szomorú itt minden! – szólt Arzén.
– Nagyon hangulatos! Nézze csak, milyen szép képet adna az az öreg anyó, a rőzsével a hátán, sárga-sárgán, akár csak egy eau forte." (175–176)

- 25 Mieke Bal, *Over-Writing as Un-writing: Descriptions, World-Making, and Novelistic Time*. Bal's lecture at Eötvös Loránd University, Department of Comparative Literature, Budapest, 09/05/2001.
- 26 Gérard Genette, *Figure II. Frontiere du récit*. Édition du Seuil, 1969, 58.
- 27 Philippe Hamon, *Introduction à l'analyse du descriptif*. Paris: Hachette, 1981.
- 28 Mieke Bal, *Over-Writing as Un-writing: Descriptions, World-Making, and Novelistic Time*. Bal's lecture at Eötvös Loránd University, Department of Comparative Literature, Budapest, 09/05/2001.
- 29 Marc Eli Blanchard, *Description: Sign, Self, Desire. Critical Theory in the Wake of Semiotics*. The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton Publishers, 1980, 18.
- 30 Mieke Bal, *Description as Narration. On Story-Telling. Essays in Narratology*. California: Polebridge Press, 1991.
- 31 Marc Eli Blanchard, *Description: Sign, Self, Desire. Critical Theory in the Wake of Semiotic*. The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton Publishers, 1980, 182.
- 32 Gábor Halász, *Válogatott írásai* [Selected writings]. Budapest: Magvető, 1959.
- 33 Greist Georgia Lenart, *The Reception of French Naturalism in the Hungarian Novel*. The University of Wisconsin, Madison, Ph.D. 1975:126–127.
- 34 Jenő Péterffy, *Válogatott művei* [Selected works]. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1962, 604–608.
- 35 Zsigmond Justh's letter to József Szinnyei the Elder (5 March 1889). In: *Justh Zsigmond naplója és levelei*. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1977.
- 36 "Nékem egypár dolog eszembe jut a távoli pátriából, a 'meleg' fogadtatás, amellyel új könyvemet látták" *Justh Zsigmond naplója és levelei*. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1977, 248.
- 37 Elemér Császár, *A magyar regény története* [History of the Hungarian novel]. Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1939.
- 38 György Bodnár, *Új Auróra* 1987/3.
- 39 "Amikor 'leír', mintha tollat cserélne, mert közlései és analízisei szikadtabbak, szárazabbak, stílustalanabbak. Tájékepei tehát a 'megszokott iránnyal' szemben újdonságok." In: Imre Bori, *Varázslók és mákvirágok*, 163–164.
- 40 Although Béla Németh G. wrote a critical essay about Justh's overesteemed place in Hungarian literary history, he also enhanced the values of Justh's descriptions. Béla G. Németh, *Szemközt egy legendával*, in Béla G. Németh, *Századutóról-századelőről*, Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1985, 220–236. Other critics who layed stress on the values of Justh's descriptive style: Aurél Kárpáti, *Justh Zsigmond*, in Kárpáti, A. *A búsképpű lovag* [The sad faced knight]. Budapest: A Táltos kiadása, 1920, 73–79; László Elek, *Justh Zsigmond*. Gyula: 1964.
- 41 "A tavaszi napfény beragyogta egész alakját. Arcza a byzanci aranyalagra festett szent képekre emlékeztetett. Hosszukás arczéle, keskeny, mandola vágású szemei, sovány, hosszú lecsüggő karjai, szájába lógó orra, mintha stylizáltak lettek volna, de szemeiből bágyadt, finomult érzékiség s mély érzés beszélt" (10).
- 42 Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt. Beyond the Wold-Image Opposition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 271.
- 43 Blanchard, 186.
- 44 Roland Barthes, *La description littéraire de l'Antiquité à Roland Barthes: une anthologie*. Paris: Éditions Macula, 1991, 251.
- 45 "... Feketés törzseik megvonalták a zöld rét világos alapját. Itt-ott egy nagy fűz, vagy nyárfa finom, picziny, fakadozó levélkéi pontoszták zöldre az ég világos, áttetsző azúrját. A pázsitot sötét lilaszin liliomok és fehér százsorszépépek tarkították. A levegőben könnyű, alig érezhető illat áradozott. Egy-egy bokorban énekes madár szólt szerényen, alig hallhatóan, tán mert

megriadt az embereknek a távolból ide hallatszó morájától, vagy tán azért, hogy a bokrok, fák és pázsit finom rajzával összhangban legyen.”

46 Gérard Genette, *Figures III*. Paris: Seuil, 1972.

47 Genette reflected on these comments in *Nouveau discours du récit*. Paris: Seuil, 1983. Monika Fludernik also examines the confusion of terms, but she completely rejects the relevance of the category “focalization” because it relates to figural discours. She blames Genette for using the lexeme as a metaphoric extension of the grammatical term voice (voix). “Interpretations of “who sees” and “who speaks” are therefore more or less based on the same type of linguistic evidence. That linguistic evidence is supplemented by perceptual and epistemological parameters – for example, what a character is likely to know or perceive – and by stylistic clues: what is likely to be the narrator’s language or the character’s.” See further problems of the term in Monika Fludernik, “New Wine in Old Bottle? Voice, Focalization, and New Writing”, *New Literary History* 32(3) (Summer 2001), 633.

48 Mieke Bal, *Images littéraires ou Comment lire visuellement Proust*. Québec: XYZ éditeur, 1997, 11.

49 Mieke Bal, *Over-Writing as Un-writing: Descriptions, World-Making, and Novelistic Time*. Bal’s lecture at Eötvös Loránd University, Department of Comparative Literature, Budapest, 09/05/2001.

50 “Ez, ez modern! Ezek a gyárkémények, a mint megvonalazzák a szürkés-kék, füsttől és párából mocskos eget, a külvárosok nedves, gőzös levegője, mely meglágyítja a körvonalakat és sejtelmessé, lágygyá teszi a képet, azok a hamvas, áttetsző színek... itt-ott egy vonal elevenzöld, kitűnő folt! Aztán azok a nagy, kiáltó téglaveres hirdetések amott a sarkon... meg a nép, ezek a munkásemberek szürke és kék zubbonyaikban... Mindez a hollandi mesterekre, az én kedvencz festőimre emlékeztet... Ezt, ezt kell megfestenünk...”

51 “csoszogó léptek,” “elhaló dal,” “durva nevetés,” “tramway-k csengése,” “robogó kocsik kerekei”.

52 “Furcsa, hogy némelykor egy-egy tájkép... s hozzá egy pár hang mennyire kifejezi lelki állapotunkat”.

53 Mieke Bal, *A leírás mint narráció*. In: *Narratívák 2. Történet és fikció* ed. by Beáta Thomka. Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 1998. (Translated from: Mieke Bal. *Description of Narration. On Story-Telling*. Essays In: *Narratology*. California: Polebridge Press, 1991.)

54 C. György Kálmán, *Te rongyos [elmjélet!]* [You ragged thoughts]. Budapest, 1998, 37.