

Borders and Identity in *A halálba táncoltatott leány* ['The Maiden Danced to Death'] and *A nagy füzet* ['The Notebook']

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Abstract: This article explores borders, border crossings and the geography of separation in two recent Hungarian films. In *The Maiden Danced to Death* (2011) and *The Notebook* (2013), two films produced within a few years of one another and just before the recent re-erection of a border between Hungary and its neighbors, escape provides the vehicle for the brothers' separation. Of particular interest is the frequent portrayal of brothers separated during communism, often with one brother staying and one leaving. In these films, regimes and ideology tear brothers apart; whether viewed on screen or only alluded to, the crossing of a border becomes a physical symbol of this separation and loss. The fraternal pairs' personal lives interact with history, especially the repressive state as manifested in Hungary's border. Geocriticism, border and trauma studies perspectives will help understand the anguish of this separation. In these films, political realities fray the bonds between brothers and lead to their separation through the border, or to its trace, as identities are subjected to traumatic reconfigurations.

Keywords: *Border, film, geocriticism, border theory, trauma theory*

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Hungary's location at the crossroads between East and West means that many of the twentieth century's turbulent events played out within its border. Only thirty years ago, Hungary dismantled its communist-era barbed wire fence separating it from Austria, thus precipitating an influx of people from other communist countries taking advantage of the legal passage. This in turn led to the destruction of the Berlin Wall, a symbol of division between two worlds. All frequently present in Hungarian films, the appearance of a border, border crossings, fences, guard towers and barbed wire function as signposts dividing the communist "here" from the implicit freedom "there." These images of separation that divide the landscape echo in family



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divisions caused by the upheavals of history. The fact that Hungary re-erected a fence to counteract the migration crisis signals that borders, separation, inclusion and exclusion still shape Hungarian history. Borders stand as physical traces of political, social and cultural barriers that separate families and siblings, thereby providing a mechanism for history to intrude into personal relationships.

Films produced after the fall of communism in 1989 continue to use the border as a physical marker of separation between family members. Of particular interest is the portrayal of separated brothers, often with one staying and one leaving, as a way to personalize the complexity of pivotal historical events. The guilt of leaving, or crossing over, becomes a theme. In these films, regimes and ideology tear brothers apart; whether viewed on screen or only alluded to, the act of crossing a border remains a physical symbol of separation and loss. In Endre Hules' 2011 *A Halálba táncoltatott leány* ['The Maiden Danced to Death'] and János Szász's 2013 *A nagy füzet* ['The Notebook'], two recent Hungarian films produced just before the most recent re-erection of a border fence to deflect migrants that was completed between June and December 2015, pairs of brothers play off one another in tense dramatic moments to emphasize how political realities intrude into personal lives. In both films, escape is the vehicle for the brothers' separation. The personal lives of these fraternal pairs—who are, in the case of *The Notebook*, twins—interact with history, especially as represented by the repressive state.

The two films under consideration here display the anguish that occurs as a consequence of crossing a forbidden border and how separation and trauma result from this loss. Although the narratives of the films move in somewhat different directions in exploring family separations, in both works the border provides a symbolic vision of traumatic loss. When the siblings are reunited in *The Maiden Danced to Death*, the past is relevant and conflict arises from the renewed contact and a reckoning with the past. *The Notebook* focuses on the twins' unbreakable unity. The siblings' family traumas are connected to historical trauma. Both films center on siblings to show the destructive and detrimental impact of history on human relationships specifically and seem to suggest that historical trauma both arises from and leads to psychological and social isolation, family conflicts and separation.

The significance of the border in *The Maiden Danced to Death* and *The Notebook* accentuates the identity crisis played out between the pair of siblings. Borders are where political geographies meet and reflect the imposition of human conceptions regarding space upon the land. Boundaries and borders constitute privileged zones where identities change and uniformity fragments. In these two films, the hard border becomes the separation zone for two otherwise unified personalities. To various degrees, the brothers in each film appear inseparable before contemplating the crossing. The bonding implicit between brothers is broken by the political realities inherent to a state that erects barriers on its borders as a means of preventing escape. The possibility of crossing the border becomes the moment when separate identities emerge.

Margit Fauser, Anne Friedrichs and Levke Harders note that newer perspectives in border studies describe borders as being politically, culturally and socially constructed through international order and complex domestic processes. Borders are "the product of power relations and their contestations, and thus that the shapes they take are subject to negotiation," rather than ontologically given or territorial fixities (Fauser et al 2019: 484-5). They also note that "questions of belonging and exclusion have long been and continue to be

important features of migration regimes' attempts to control borders and govern mobility" (485). In her study on the state of border studies, Anna Paasi argues that borders are expressions of territoriality crucial to what can be called the discursive landscape of power (Paasi 2011: 43). Paasi further notes that borders are complex social institutions that exist in spatial scale and are related to social practices (48) and integrates these comments into an examination of whether a theory of border studies might be useful. In line with recent shifts in border studies, James Scott states that borders are complex political institutions transecting social spaces not only in administrative but also in cultural, economic, and functional terms. "Central to this perspective are multiple interpretations of border significance, border-related elements of identity formation, sociocultural and experiential bases for border-defining processes, power relations in society and geopolitical orders, as well as critical analyses of geopolitical discourses" (Scott 2012: 85). For these reasons, we can explore how the presence of the border in these two films is both an anchor into a political and social reality as well as a physical reminder of the traumatic relationships the siblings in these films live. The bond between siblings is broken only by the imposition of political realities as expressed in the creation and maintenance of borders.

The Maiden Danced to Death portrays the lives of two brothers who had been separated for twenty years because of forced exile, yet have now reunited to revive the Hungarian folk dance troupe in which they had both participated. The director of the troupe, Gyula, is married to Mari, his brother István's former lover. István (Pista) left Hungary as a young man for what he thought was a week; however his passport was revoked while he was abroad. István emigrated to Canada and ultimately Anglicized his name to Steve Court. Now a famous impresario, he returns to Budapest without first telling his brother or his parents in order to work with his brother's moribund dance troupe. During an extremely tense family dinner, their still hostile father expresses his bitterness toward his son for having left and not showing gratitude to the country that had welcomed the family, refugees from the former Yugoslavia who were forced to flee due to the father's role in resisting the Nazis. An outspoken critic of the regime, István had already been in trouble with the authorities before leaving Hungary.

This film's timeframe is situated after the fall of the Berlin Wall; the dance company finds itself in a new era, when state subsidies for the arts have disappeared. Mari suggests they revive their triumphant dance routine, *The Maiden Danced to Death*, a folktale about a young girl who dances to her death after being exiled from her village. While he is reuniting with his dance troupe and his brother in Hungary, Steve obtains the dossier that was prepared about his political activities through the Ministry; these documents prove that Gyula had betrayed him to the authorities, thereby leading to the revocation of his passport. What is more, Gyula sent the authorities monthly reports on István's activities as a way to prevent them from shutting down the dance company. The tension inherent in their relationship began with sibling rivalry as children and grows with acts of betrayal committed in adulthood. The separated brothers also lived an economic separation as István, transformed into Steve, is wealthy. Betrayal comes in other forms as Mari and István rekindle their relationship while Gyula has a one-night stand with the lead dancer in the performance.

The crux of the family drama lies in the betrayal of one brother by another. In a traditional sense, Steve had not escaped, but rather gone abroad to Moscow for a period.

Upon trying to return to Hungary and finding his passport had been revoked, he emigrates to Canada after three months at the border trying to reenter. All the male members of the family contribute to the chasm between both the brothers and the brothers and their father. Having embraced his new country after fleeing from Yugoslavia, the father was a party functionary whose role made Steve previously suspect him of preventing his return from Moscow. Although Gyula worked against his brother, he defends himself by saying that he did it to save the company. His brother and father repeatedly accuse Steve of having "sold out" to the corporate culture of North America, an act they see even in the erasing of his Hungarian name. Crossing the ocean and the border in an attempt to return to his roots could mean a reconciliation of these tensions. Even though crossing the border between countries has become unhampered, the deeper split that separates family members due to either perceived or actual betrayals of the fatherland or brotherhood remain deep wounds.

The tension between father and son is a peripheral, yet crucial element of *The Maiden Danced to Death* as we learn that the father rejected István because he left. Father and son, and then brother and brother, have repeated exchanges about the betrayal implicit to having left Hungary to "make it big." One of the themes that unites the dance and the lives of the characters is the idea of "having danced with the devil" to make it rich. The dance performance mirrors the life trajectory of the brothers: exile, longing, and dancing perhaps to death. With its primeval movements and masks, the dance sequence lends a universality and atemporality to the brothers' situation. In some ways, the two brothers in this film hearken back to the archetypal story of Cain and Abel; in this case, however, the brothers are fighting to lay claim to the Hungarian birthright symbolized in the dance.

Since the film takes place after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there are no true physical walls between characters; nor does the camera linger on national borders in either Budapest or Canada. Yet the border dividing Hungary from its neighbors is part of the backstory and is mentioned several times as Steve and Gyula discuss what happened to make Steve leave Hungary twenty years previously. In addition, several dividing structures provide visual tension in the film, thereby acting as de facto barriers replacing the now erased national border. Numerous structures, almost all within Budapest—bridges and the Danube itself—split the frame and provide the backdrop for crucial scenes. More than merely pleasing panoramas, the placement of barriers, often in the middle of the frame, subdivides the scene and forces the viewer to reconstruct the visual landscape. In an early scene, Steve's hotel window opens out on the bridge that spans the middle of the frame towards the horizon. On one of his first mornings at the hotel, Steve goes for a jog and, once again, the bridge looms behind him in the distance as he runs along the banks of the Danube.

The river itself provides a liminality that characters are not shown crossing. Most telling, each time a "heart to heart" talk occurs during which some key piece of family information is revealed to the viewer, the characters are either directly under a bridge, right next to it, or walking under it. This visual hook occurs when the two brothers vent after the disastrous family reunion, when Mari is consoled by Steve after she learns she is being given the secondary role in the dance, when Mari and Gyula reconcile after facing their infidelity and again after Steve confronts Gyula about his betrayal to the authorities twenty years previously. With suspension cables or steel girders featured in the frame foreground, the weight of the bridge is often emphasized in a way that dwarfs the characters. They sometimes

perch ominously close to the water, almost as though contemplating suicide. The bridge casts a shadow upon them and blocks their view.

By not showing characters crossing Budapest's bridges, the film negates one of the most common metaphorical potentials of bridges as unifying iconographic elements. In some sense, the bridges transform into borders because they split the unified frame into several visual spaces just as fenced or walled borders divide a unified landscape. When the brothers confront one another, they reproach each other for having chosen sides and for each having danced with the devil; the only difference is that Steve chose the devil who paid more handsomely. In the end, the brothers arrive at reconciliation once the new dance production has become an international success.

Family traumas can come from within when families are reunited, but unresolved past actions and events continue to cause rifts. Borders can become important markers of the kind of relational instabilities that produce traumatic encounters and reckonings. In his geocritical analysis, Eric Prieto notes that spaces, once thought to be self-contained, autonomous and defined in stable, self-evident ways, are in fact in constant flux. Instead, spaces are loosely delineated by borders that are shifting, permeable and always open to question (Prieto 2016: 21). These fluid zones of transgression allow for encounters with the Other, an event that may encourage questions of identity. The visual barriers that separate characters without de facto limiting their movements present visual zones of transgression, such as permeable zones of encounter between estranged brothers who are forced to confront a family trauma. In this borderless, post-communist world, the chasms caused by history-inflicted betrayals remain to separate siblings.

The borders depicted in *The Maiden Danced to Death* are both real and subliminal as the brothers' animosity stems from the inability to return from having crossed the border, the fluid space that comingles East and West. Once the physical border is erased, the separation between siblings could also be erased; traces of the wounds left from past incidents continue to color the relationship. The border thereby becomes the geographical marker of the separated identities. Budapest's bridges and the Danube replace the national border with its barbed wire to continue distancing brothers even after decades of physical separation.

In this post-communist Budapest, the absence of actual barriers that impede physical interaction between the brothers is irrelevant, for the borders have left a trace. In her book containing interviews with widows of the Rwandan genocide, Jennifer Yusin states that in her experience with this group of survivors, "every trauma is a trace... Trace is therefore taken as a form of writing that is said to account for the violent rupture and the overwhelming impact of its effects on the psyche" (Yusin 2017: xi). For Yusin, trauma is a "mutable, interactive, unstable place among the plural systems of legacy, inheritance and memory" (1). The border's inherent instability mirrors the instability of memory, especially traumatic memory. It is this invisible barrier that leaves a trace that continues to define and affect the brothers' relationship. The identity split that took place cannot begin to be healed until they immerse themselves in Hungary's distant, tribal, past to perform a cleansing dance ritual that alludes to primitive separations and loss. The biblical overtones of this folklore narrative bring the two brothers together to recreate a Hungarian story as they are unable to recapture their own pasts before separation. Physically crossing the border provided the impetus for the creation of very separate identities, including a name change, thus erasing the

patriarchal link to the individual past. Only a return to the primeval, collective past through performing the maiden's story can perhaps bridge the identity gap.

Separation in the film leads to individualization, including the fact that the brothers adopt different patronyms. Steve's name change makes him a new, Westernized man, as he is the one who moved across the border. This decision not only provided an opportunity to differentiate himself, but also to move beyond the stifling environment of bitterness and slowly fading cultural identity as witnessed in the dance troupe's decline. His return to his country and his family at a time when the physical border had already disappeared could have led to an assimilation into his former life and situation. Instead, Steve brings his new perspective, with its multiple identities and its new viewpoints, and in the process relives yet also rejects the identity that he had been forced to leave behind. The revival of the troupe through the medium of an ancient dance that is performed using the latest technology to enhance the performance (fog machines, lighting effects, etc.) shows how crossing the border and coming back can renew a once-static environment and culture. The film's visual insistence on dividing the frame with barriers, however, recalls deeper fissures that may never be closed once betrayal has infiltrated relationships.

The Notebook brings together twin brothers brutalized into becoming killers because of the society around them. Unlike the brothers in *The Maiden Danced to Death*, they do not betray one another, for only together are they strong enough to survive violence. The dynamic of the twin boys in the maelstrom of the Second World War provides the interplay of male sibling pairs and the dramatic historical events that contextualize their lives. The Nazis and their decadent brutality, as well as Soviet domination, remain peripheral to the twins' estrangement from their surrounding environment. The political subjugation these regimes inflict on society is an excuse for the villagers to unleash their own brand of destruction.

In this film, thirteen-year-old twins living in Budapest are taken by their mother to their abusive grandmother who resides in a small village near the border. Their mother had been estranged from the grandmother, who did not even know she was married. In the film, their father gives them a notebook in which they are to continue to do their lessons and record events. In the novel by the same name, the twins buy the notebook for themselves in the village shop so they can continue their studies. This distinction is important for, in the film, the notebook becomes an inheritance of sorts from the journalist father to his sons and can perhaps be interpreted as a way of providing a legacy as witnesses to history. When the children buy their own notebook, as they do in the novel, it allows them to shape their own destiny.

The grandmother remains hostile to the boys, who respond with sullen obedience and wariness. Just as the threesome slowly begins to coexist in this rural hinterland far from the frontlines, a German commander and his aide commandeer the main farmhouse for their headquarters, thereby relegating the grandmother and boys to the farm cottage. Their existence hinges upon bartering farm produce in the village, and the boys become close to a young woman with a cleft palate, nicknamed "Harelip," who lives in the neighboring farmhouse.

For the majority of the film, the twins are absolutely inseparable, a circumstance emphasized by the fact that they always appear in the same frame, often staring at the

camera. The French-language novel upon which the film is based, a work written by the Hungarian émigrée author, Agota Kristof, *The Notebook* (published in 1986 as the first novel in a trilogy that also includes *The Proof* and *The Third Lie*) also emphasizes the twins' inseparability. In discussing the novel, Simona Cutcan states that "the twins' relationship is so strong that nothing else can come between them. When together, they are like one being, when separated they are waiting for each other and no other person can fill the void left by the other brother's disappearance" (Cutcan 2013: 14). The border appears prominently at the beginning of the novel when Kristof describes the grandmother's house, situated among the last houses of the village before arriving at the border. It also appears prominently at the end, described in minute details, when the father and sons attempt to cross. The boys also watch the border, as they do in the film, where they discover the camp. The border is given a kind of texture in the novel, with two rows of barbed wire, a minefield in between and rows of trees on either side. The permeability of the border leads to visual multiplicity and will provide the only mechanism for the twins to form separate identities.

Surrounded by brutality—the grandmother berates them, punishes them and makes them perform manual labor (not just household chores) for their food and lodging, the village is filled with thieves and Nazi collaborators—the boys begin a regiment to toughen themselves. They beat each other bloody and chant slogans of hatred. As they witness the growing cruelty in the village, experience the harsh life their grandmother creates for them and witness the viciousness of the Nazi commander and his adjutants who have taken over the grandmother's house, their notebook becomes filled with images of death and destruction. They begin to intimidate the grandmother and retaliate against others to the point of committing murder.

It must, however, be emphasized that these instances are never portrayed as acts of violence towards victims selected at random. As in war, the boys instead see what appears to them as injustice and perpetuate violence against those who have meted it out. The novel contains more gratuitous acts of violence than does the film; for example, when the twins hang a cat. As was mentioned, in several respects the novel emphasizes the twins' self-education whereas the film seems to show them as victims of circumstance more often than they are in the novel.

In the film, the twins continue to react instinctively to people who show them kindness by considering them "best friends." After having learned to steal from "Harelip," the boys try to buy themselves warm boots. The Jewish shoemaker is one of the few people in the film who pities the boys. When they come to him with only enough money for one boot, the shoemaker offers them two pairs for free and tells them to save their money to buy warm socks upon learning that they are the grandchildren of the woman the townspeople refer to as the "witch." When Jews are rounded up in the village and the clergyman's housemaid tells the Nazis where the shoemaker lives, thus assuring his death, the boys rig an explosion using ammunition they removed from a dead soldier's corpse and kill her. In one of the few acts of reverence the boys display after having become hardened, they remove their hats upon seeing the shoemaker's corpse on the floor. The viewer is thus led to believe that they murder the maid in revenge against her betrayal of the shoemaker. They work together with a logic shaped by the brutal circumstances in which they find themselves.

While *The Maiden Danced to Death* concentrates on adults whose past is only relived in discussions with parents and friends, *The Notebook* focuses entirely on the formative years of this pair of siblings. Parents and family members are crucial to the arrested emotional development of the pair portrayed in *The Notebook*. Despite having abandoned her years before, the boys' mother brings them to the grandmother. The mother then returns in the final days of the war to take the boys away with her Nazi lover and their new baby. The boys refuse, and the mother hesitates too long in the farmhouse courtyard before returning to the car that will lead her out of Hungary: she and the baby are killed in a bomb explosion. Cutcan analyzes the female characters in Kristof's works and concludes that in *The Notebook* as elsewhere, "the strength of some female characters together with the undermining of the male protagonists' position on the narrative, personal and social level shake the foundations of the patriarchal hierarchy" (Cutcan 2013: 15). Ultimately, the mother's abandonment and the grandmother's cruelty provide the basis for the twins' unsentimental education as they first learn to survive in this borderland and then form separate identities as one prepares to leave, while the other stays behind.

Initially we are to believe the boys' previous life in Budapest was idyllic and their life with the grandmother is nothing but monstrous; as they develop, a sort of primitive system of familial loyalties also unfolds. In early scenes, the parents are extremely doting; at first, their mother sends them notes filled with loving thoughts. The grandmother treats them cruelly, but eventually reconciles with them and shows them her treasures in case she dies. After suffering a stroke, she asks them to poison her. Meanwhile, the parents have effectively abandoned the boys. Bearing a new baby in her arms, the mother returns in an attempt to retrieve the twins as she and her new lover race for the border as the final battle looms. Although the father comes back after the war, when the boys ask him why he does not stay with them on the farm now that the grandmother is dead, he does not answer. The war has replaced the almost mythically enchanted life the boys led with a series of relationships based on rewards earned for deeds and punishments meted out for transgressions. In a way, this new "lifestyle" effectively mimics the camp on the other side of the border which—for the boys—symbolizes the war that they know is raging around them and has brought them to this village.

Since his gift of a notebook failed to nurture their development as civilized beings, it is fitting that the father should be the mechanism by which the boys ultimately separate, with one crossing the border and the other remaining. To be shared between the boys to record what should have been their studies and feelings, the notebook fails to humanize them. Released from a prison camp, the father reenters the twins' lives after the war. He intends to leave Hungary and the border town provides a convenient exit point. Although the boys go through the motions of preparing to escape with him, in reality they need his corpse to step over when crossing. When they send the father through the barbed wire first, he trips a land mine and is killed, thereby providing safe passage for the next escapee. For the first time in the film, we see the boys separate. Only one of them goes to the west, carrying the notebook. The other remains. In this way, their notebook records the fall, their personal fall, and that of the world around them.

The notebook itself seems a curious trace of civilization; as Yusin noted, it is perhaps the trace left to witness the trauma of society or of the individual. Presumably, the children

were meant to record their growth and maturity in it. Instead, the screen shots we see of the notebook pages contain bloodstains, crudely drawn weapons and other suggestions of the dehumanizing treatment the children experience. An erasure could have left behind a trace; the disappearance of one or both of these twins due to violence and de-humanization could have been partially redeemed through the traces of the notebook if it had contained images and words of promise. Instead, written words and images do not console. The twins even burn the letters—containing the few words of comfort they had ever received—their mother wrote them as a final gesture toward their need to prepare for the hard realities of their new world separated by the border.

The border returns throughout the film and changes with the actual political reality. In the film, there are a series of barriers—a garden, a stream, a forest—between the grandmother's house and the border. The border thus appears as a multilayered barrier separating one land from another, the shifting, permeable space that Prieto suggested. During the war, the boys see a camp on the other side of the border, where they know from the start there is "another country." The first time the barbed wire border fence appears on screen, we see guards and dogs patrolling, we hear them shout "roll call," and the narrative voiceover of the twins notes that "this is war," showing how the border becomes the visual symbol itself of the familial separations the war has wrought on the family. The border then begins to appear in their notebooks, below a drawing of a group of prisoners hanging from the gallows, an obvious recreation of a scene the boys must have witnessed in the camps. At one point they return to the border to see the camp, empty and quiet, an indication to the viewer that the war is near its conclusion; in the next scene, Soviet tanks do indeed enter the border town. At the end of the film, two barbed wire fences have been installed across the border with land mines in between. This comprises the border that ultimately separates the twins.

As was previously mentioned, separation had never happened to this pair of siblings: in almost every frame in which they appear, the twins stand side-by-side, exact replicas of one another. For much of the film they dress alike and only rarely appear with a relative or some other character between them. Even when they are under interrogation for the murder of the maid and the police try to separate them so they will not corroborate each other's stories, they can still hear and answer questions for one another. As the boys are being taken back home after the interrogation, the narrative overlay informs us that the only truly difficult thing for them is separation from one another, an experience that is worse even than the beatings they have endured. Even though the border looms in the lives of these two boys, they watch it from one side; at one point they stand arm-in-arm, facing away from the camera.

This unified front, of course, is what breaks at the very end. Reminiscent of mythical creation stories in which sons must kill the father to take their rightful places in society, the boys sacrifice their father so one can escape. Knowing he will be blown up, they send the father across the border, thereby creating an opening for one of the two brothers to cross over. The one who goes over takes with him the notebook of the film's title. Never separated but always watching the border, the twins are now separated by it. In this film, one family relationship after another falls by the wayside, a casualty, in a sense, of war. The loving nuclear family of the beginning leads to the uneasy meeting between estranged mother and daughter. The grandmother in turn becomes the surrogate parent, a relationship with which

the boys ultimately reconcile and to which they remain loyal. Neither the mother's nor the father's return ultimately separates them from the grandmother. With her, they replace nurturing bonds for survival skills; in many ways, the family unit reverts back to the tribe. With all relatives gone after the deaths of the grandmother and father, only then do the brothers break away from one another; only then can one of them cross the ultimate dividing line established in this film. With no father or fatherland that holds any promise for them, the bond between brothers is severed as well. Only the notebook itself remains as witness to what their life had been.

The doubling implicit in featuring brothers, or even more so twins, could be a way to prepare for an erasure in which one sibling moves into the space of the other. This technique is reminiscent of the *doppelgänger*, a figure in German folklore who represents the invisible double, ultimately capable of overwhelming the self. The nameless twins in *The Notebook* are *doppelgängers* who cannot survive alone. On screen, the pair appears almost always facing the camera, usually scowling, bewildered without showing it, wary. When one leaves Hungary, he is effectively erased, as though the *doppelgänger* has overtaken the self. Survival no longer necessitates a team effort. The camera lingers on the increasingly small figure moving towards the horizon after having successfully crossed the now-permeable border. Effectively erased on screen, he now carries with him the trace of both brothers' past. In *The Maiden Danced to Death*, both brothers take a bow onstage at the conclusion of the show, uneasily reunited by this recreation of a folkloric past but with the looming shadow of their past betrayal still between them. In his study of border processes in the Southern Cone, Alejandro Grimson discusses what he calls "identity borders," that is, borders related to the categories used to classify individuals and groups. In these two recent Hungarian films, the border, its trace, and identity are indeed intertwined.

As Prieto states, crossing a "self-contained and autonomous, defined in stable, self-evident ways" border that instead proves to be "in constant flux, loosely delineated by borders that are shifting, permeable" provides the moment when inseparable identities split. Brothers who had otherwise acted as one must now decide to stay or to leave, to endure or to escape. They and the border that they cross thereby come to represent the Hungarian diaspora and the dilemmas faced during historical upheavals. Borders bring what was previously marginalized to the center, they are zones where the self and the Other, previously in the shadows, meet, a space of movement and confrontation. In filmic representations created in a country that has been divided from its neighbors by a seemingly impermeable border for decades of its modern history, crossing proves a way to divide families and splinter siblings. What remains after this fracture is the word, the notebook, the traces of memory that will also cross the border. Or the dance, an ancient ritual that has been revived and renewed to demonstrate how cultural memory is resilient even as individuals remain divided and betrayed.

In *The Maiden Danced to Death*, where brother betrays brother, and *The Notebook*, where society turns brothers into violent machines, confrontation with the regime ultimately leads to separation. Identities are formed through the trauma of leaving, symbolized by crossing the border; betrayal, however, leaves a shadow that cannot be erased. The bond of brotherhood proves even stronger than ties to the fatherland and the border provides the only way for siblings to separate. While the notebook provides the only trace of the path that led

to this separation, the dance reunites separated brothers in the common purpose of reviving an aspect of Hungarian culture. An imaginary line traced to separate two humanly created spaces, the geography of the border becomes the mechanism for separating the people who inhabit spaces that have been reshaped, erased, and recreated through the movement of borders just as Hungary has during its history.

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