

## The History of the Poetic Mind of János Pilinszky

Gábor Szmeskó

**Abstract:** One of the most important poets of postwar Hungarian literature, János Pilinszky's (1921-1981) poetry represents the problems of connecting with the Other, the imprints of Second World War trauma and the struggle with God's distance and silence. Although, unlike the case of most of his contemporaries in Eastern bloc Hungary, his poetry has been translated into several languages, he is hardly known in English-speaking countries. The metaphysically accented lyrical worldview and creator-centered aesthetics—which shows parallels with the Christian poetry of Michael Edwards—of this Hungarian poet are difficult to link or to bring into discourse. On the occasion of the most recent publication (Pilinszky 2019) of Pilinszky's non-literary publications which are practically unknown to non-Hungarian scholars, I attempt to outline the major attributes of Pilinszky's poetry and aesthetics in order to highlight—with a mystical approach in mind—the intertwining presence of said lyre and aesthetics in his poem, *In memoriam F. M. Dosztojevskij* ['In Memoriam F. M. Dostoevsky'].

**Keywords:** *Hungarian literature, Catholic literature, mystical poetry, aesthetics, text editing*

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The poems of Hungarian poet János Pilinszky (1921-1981), who was active during the second half of the twentieth century, are known only to a narrow scope of English-speaking audience. Ted Hughes was the first to translate Pilinszky's poems with the mediation of the Hungarian poet, János Csokits; their cooperation was followed by several other publications and translations (Pilinszky 1976, 1982a, 1989, 1991, Wilmer 2018) by accomplished translators, such as Ádám Makkai (1996), who, like Csokits, fled to the West from the communist regime. As an employee of Radio Free Europe (1963-73) and the BBC (1974-86), Csokits kept a close watch on the cultural life of Hungary and helped with the publication of Hungarian works in Western countries in any possible way. He became acquainted with Ted Hughes in 1960, who mentioned his intent to establish a magazine for translations of contemporary, non-English poetry (Csokits 2017:8). Hughes started *Modern Poetry in Translation* five years later with Daniel Weissbort. Csokits was asked to edit a special edition for Hungarian poetry, yet the project was never carried out due to disagreement within the Hungarian emigre community (Gomori 2011). It seemed that the raw translations of Csokits would be lost forever, as at the 1969 Poetry



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International festival in London, Pilinszky's poetry was presented in the raw translation of Péter Siklós and the literary translation of Ted Hughes, after a presentation of Pilinszky himself. After the festival, Pilinszky and Hughes met in England on a few occasions. Hughes's deep interest in Pilinszky's poetry was not only due to their personal acquaintance, but also to the Hungarian poet's lyrical tune. In 1976, after some setbacks in their translation and publication, a selection of Pilinszky's poetry finally appeared in a joint translation by Csokits and Hughes. In his foreword to *Selected Poems*, Hughes voices a dilemma that is still present in the reception of Pilinszky's work today while making the following observation regarding Pilinszky's poetry: "Critical judgement cannot rest in the aesthetic excellence of his work: it inevitably ends up arguing the ethical-religious position of Pilinszky himself" (Pilinszky 1976: 7). With the latest publication of Pilinszky's non-literary works in mind, it may be worth reconsidering the aesthetics that is hidden behind the poetry of this Hungarian poet, for it can be discovered most readily through his publications. My aim is to contextualize Pilinszky's poetry through the new edition of his publications (Pilinszky 2019) with a focus on the aesthetic theme that may be found through the range of questions therein and its interrelation with his poetics.

In the poetic scene of twentieth-century Hungary, János Pilinszky is regarded as a poet who developed his own poetic language, one that is infused with the trauma of the Second World War and is characterized by silence and motifs of *tárgyasítás* ['objectification']. Silence attributes Pilinszky's poetry in several, purely poetic contexts, such as by avoiding verbosity and chatting in favor of the meticulous selection of words (Horváth 2018). This trait may be connected to the objectification present in Pilinszky's poems, which represents the lyrical self in a covert, indirect way. Pilinszky's poem entitled *Halak a hálóban* ["Fish in the Net"] presents a fitting example of this objectification: *Csillaghálóban hanyódnak/ partravont halak,/ szánk a semmiségbe tátog,/ száraz űrt harap.* ['Writhing in a star-net/ like fish hauled on land/ we gasp in the emptiness/ our gills filled with sand' (Pilinszky 2015, 11)].<sup>1</sup> Hungarian scholars who have written about Pilinszky's poetry compare him to Stéphane Mallarmé, Rainer Maria Rilke, Thomas Sterne Eliot, Ezra Pound, Paul Celan and Slavko Mihalić and have also deduced the influence of Mihály Babits, Lőrinc Szabó and the late works of Attila József, to mention some further influences from within Hungarian literature (Beney 2010, Danyi 2010: 193-198; Szávai 2005: 9-10; Schein 1998: 163-178).

Since it did not conform to the expectations of the exact perception-based experience poetry, Pilinszky's poetic language did not meet the standards of the *vallomásos kollektív beszédmód* ['confessional collective speech']<sup>2</sup> that had been ordained in the 1960s and 70s through the Marxist aesthetics of György Lukács (Schein 1998: 148). Unlike Marxist aesthetics, Pilinszky's poems are apolitical and keep their distance from the perceptible world; they adhere to a metaphysical, mystic tradition that had been almost unknown to Hungarian literature. His poetry focuses on the event of encounter between the self and the transcendental. The recurring biblical and theological themes within his texts provide layers of metaphysical meaning for his poetry. Even the Catholic attributes of his poetry do not conform to earlier traditional Hungarian Catholic poetry (Szénási 2011, 2018: 23-31), which may be why Pilinszky referred on several

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Kenneth White.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

occasions to the self-definition of François Mauriac: *Költő vagyok és katolikus* ['I am a poet and a Catholic'] (Pilinszky 2016: 28, 51, Hankovszky 2020, 286-287).

Pilinszky's poetry can be read as the lyre of absurd existence, linking the poet's oeuvre to French existentialism, primarily to the works of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. As Dorottya Szávai points out, "The life-work of Albert Camus was tolerated by the cultural politics of János Kádár...and gained an almost cultic-mythic importance among the Hungarian artists, writers and intellectuals of the 1960s and 70s" ['*a kádárista kultúrpolitika által megtűrt Camus-életmű...szinte kultikus-mitikus jelentőségre tett szert a '60-as-'70-es évek magyar művészi, írói, értelmiségi köreiből*'] (2005: 73). During the 1960s, Pilinszky's thinking was governed by the problem of the absurd. His question was not whether the world is absurd, but whether his own answer should be the same as that of Camus (Hankovszky 1997: 122). Pilinszky's response to the incomprehensibility and unreasonability behind the absurdity of existence was the following: "Beyond discovering the absurdness of the existing world, however...there is a more consequent, in essence, more absurd step: accepting the impossibility of the world. In this sense, it is true that 'Dostoevsky's answer is humility,' but this humility—shouldering the weight of the world's impossibility, mantling the incongruity between existence and our own discrepancies—is everything but a retreat" ['*Csakhogy a világ abszurditásának fölismerésén túl...van egy még következetesebb, ha úgy tetszik, még abszurdabb lépés, s ez a világ képtelenségének a vállalása. Ilyen értelemben igaz, hogy 'Dostojevszkij válasza az alázat', csakhogy ez az alázat—magunkra venni a világ képtelenségének súlyát, mintegy beöltözve a lét és tulajdon ellentmondásaink terhébe—minden, csak nem meghátrálás*'] (Pilinszky 2015: 97).

Regarding the existentialist problem horizon, Magdolna Danyi emphasizes that Pilinszky's poetry recounts not only the silence and distance of the transcendental but also the lyrical self's longing for the transcendental. Thus, Pilinszky perceives the impossibility of *unio mystica*, or the presence of God, and attempts to connect with the transcendental through the experience of the distance and absence of the transcendental (Danyi 1998: 1645-1647). The poet found escape from the *az abszurd kísértése* ['temptation of the absurd'] (Hankovszky 1997: 122) primarily through the texts of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard and Simone Weil, influences that lead to the renewal of his poetry during the late 1960s and early 70s. As Gábor Schein keenly observes, "Pilinszky's late poems do not follow reality; their language is not a mere tool of mediation, but presents itself as immediate reality: it does not expect some outer instance to legitimize and justify its existence, but discovers that in the possible correlations of meaning" ['*Pilinszky kései versei nem követik a valóságot, a nyelv nem pusztán a közvetítés szerepét vállalja, hanem maga is közvetlen realitásként mutatkozik meg, s nem valami külső instanciától várja létének igazolását és igazságát, hanem a lehetséges értelmi összefüggéseken belül fedezi azt fel*'] (1998: 160).

The first extensive compilation of Pilinszky's "non-literary prose" (Pilinszky 1982: 473), *Szög és olaj* ['Nail and Oil'], was published in 1982, one year after the poet's death and under the editorship of István Jelenits, the poet's religious mentor. (The edition's title refers to one of Pilinszky's poems, *Címerem* ['My Coat of Arms']: "Grace and joy have ripened /together with what is generally called/ misery. //Oil and nail could be my coat of arms...." (Pilinszky 1989: 59)). Until the end of the twentieth century, this book was succeeded by several editions, each comprising an increasingly extensive scope (Pilinszky 1984, 1993, 1999). During the 1990s, Zoltán Hafner took over Jelenits's editorial work and published *Publicisztikai írások* ['Non-Literary Publications'], a compilation of notes prepared for an upcoming comprehensive and

critical edition of Pilinszky's non-literary works which was followed during the 2000s by two thematic selections: *Karácsony* ['Christmas'] and *Húsvét* ['Easter']. Compared to this earlier editorial practice (that each edition should act as a thematic compilation or an addition to an expanding collection of the poet's works), I find the 2019 edition of János Pilinszky's non-literary texts (*Esszék, cikkek* ['Essays, Articles']) to be an interim editorial solution.

Breaking with the earlier tradition, József Bende's edition *Esszék, cikkek* ['Essays, Articles'] contains neither the reviews written between 1941-43 that were included in the 1999 edition (36 articles), nor all of the 586 articles written between 1942-81 that were also included in the 1999 edition. Of this latter category, Bende selected 468 articles for his own edition, yet omitted 118 articles that were included in the 1999 edition. At the same time, he included four articles that were omitted from previous editions. According to Bende, the editorial intention was "to make... 'the divine papers' of Pilinszky accessible to a public, who is familiar only with his poetry, as his publications are inseparable from and enlightening about said poetry" [*az volt a célunk, hogy a mindmáig leginkább csak Pilinszky verseit ismerő szélesebb olvasóközönséghez is eljusson az életműve többi részétől elválaszthatatlan, azt számos ponton megvilágító...égi publicisztikája*] (Pilinszky 2019: 758). In essence, the purpose of the edition was to represent the non-literary publications of Pilinszky. It may have been more appropriate to publish a more selective (in essence, shorter) edition with a broad perspective, thus enabling a wider audience to access the mindset that served as the background for Pilinszky's poetry through the highlights of his non-literary works: a compilation that could serve as a tool for the general understanding of the Pilinszky-phenomenon.

The incompleteness of Bende's edition is indicative of the general reception of Pilinszky, as most of the omitted texts were part of the two categories that have always eluded the attention of scholars. One of these two categories contains the short story-style texts that were written between 1958 and 1963: their appeal lies more in their description of a sensation—*a kegyelem érintésének ábrázolása* ['the touch of Divine grace'] (Pilinszky 2019: 105)—rather than their aesthetic quality. While analyzing these short story-esque texts, Tamás Hankovszky highlights the fact that during the time period of their publication, Pilinszky was silent as a poet, and a new form of insight can be detected in his aesthetics, one that is not independent from the transformation of his poetic language (Hankovszky 2015: 250-257). On the other hand, several of Pilinszky's critiques and reviews about films were omitted from Bende's edition. I do not claim that these omitted texts should have been included, yet as far as I know, there has been little to no critical reaction to the fact that primarily during the 1960s, Pilinszky dedicated several articles to his experiences of motion pictures. The necessity of a dialogue between Pilinszky's poetry, poetic language or mode of description and film theory or cinematography is evident. Merely by focusing on the fact that in this period, Pilinszky's poetry was shifting towards descriptive, presentative figures, it becomes clear that this question deserves scholarly attention.

Interestingly, as Bende was sifting through the texts already published in previous editions, he seems to have taken care not to omit any texts mentioning the name of Simone Weil (1909-1943). To understand Bende's selective process, we have to take a cursory look at Weil's effect on Pilinszky. In Hungary, the name of the French philosopher first arose in connection with Pilinszky himself. In contrast, Weil's almost entire oeuvre is available in English and several studies prove that she is worth scholarly attention even today. Pilinszky bought his first volumes of Weil's works during his first visit to France in 1963 (these probably being *La pesanteur et la grâce* ['Gravity and Grace'] and *Attente de Dieu* ['Waiting for God']), which he

started to translate during the summer of 1964. Her works are considered to have a major influence on the poetic renewal of Pilinszky's poetry from the mid-sixties, or at most, the early seventies. Before (and even after) the renewal of Pilinszky's poetry, he paid close attention to Weil's writings: he translated many of her works (Weil 1994) and even claimed that he did not actually learn French but rather Weil's language (Pilinszky 2016: 66). He refers to Weil as an unquestionable authority in several of his essays. It shows his enthusiasm of Weil that though he refers to her on several occasions, he proposes only one, slight piece of criticism towards her (Pilinszky 1999: 426). It must be stated, however, that Pilinszky represented a Catholic reading of Weil, one that was only interested in the mystic aspects of her ideas that could be linked to Catholicism. Consequently, he focuses only on Weil's mystic works (written between 1940-43) and disregards the self-contradictory aspects of her theology, syncretism, sensitivity to astronomy, the presence of Orientalism in her philosophy and so forth (Bende 2000, McCullough 2014: 5-8). Paradoxically, the Hungarian scholarly scene still owes us a *systematic* analysis of Weil's effect on Pilinszky's works. (As a clarification, I must note that several studies have tried to raise awareness toward this lack of systematic attention (Beney 1985, Bende 2000, Sepsi 2016, Szmeskó 2019), but discussing these would exceed the limits of this article.) This lack of systematic analysis may have been the reason why Bende, who had ample knowledge about both Pilinszky and Weil's works, included all texts connecting the two in the book.

From the 1960s onwards, Pilinszky's essays were governed by Catholic poetry, the essence of art and the primary questions of authentic Christian life. These texts appeared mainly as articles in the weekly newspaper *Új Ember* ['New Self'], one of the two journals published by the Catholic church that was tolerated by the Kádár regime (the other being the periodical *Vigilia* ['Vigilance']). *Új Ember* was one of the few journals where writers who were excommunicated from the literary discourse by the Marxist authority could publish their works. From 1957 until his death (1981), Pilinszky worked as an editor for *Új Ember*, which means that Pilinszky's turn towards theology during the 1960s was not related to the mentality expected by the journal as he was initially employed because of his Catholic commitment, among other reasons. Nevertheless, the intellectual scene surrounding *Új Ember* proved to be an important influence in regards to the contemporary developments of theology, philosophy and Western culture. One example of this may be Pilinszky's exposure to Weil's works, as during his trip to Paris in 1963, he was asked by the editors of the newspaper to write an article about her (Bende 2000: 514). After the quite vague portrait of Weil's life that Pilinszky wrote for the paper in 1963, her mystic texts seem to have gained an increasing importance in developing his own philosophy. Ever since the late 1970s, the question of whether his poetry can be regarded as mystic is imperative to scholars of Pilinszky (Radnóti 1981). A close examination of his non-literary works encourages the reevaluation of this debate, leading to the following, more expressive question: can Pilinszky's work be regarded as mystic under the terms of the Catholic tradition? The reason why this dilemma demands scholarly attention is that it is important to assess whether a new reading that focuses not on the World War poetry and existentialist paradigms, but on the mystic aspect of Pilinszky would be suitable as a critical method for the analysis of this Hungarian poet's entire oeuvre.

Pilinszky created a new concept as a key aspect of his art philosophy described as *evangéliumi esztétika* ['evangelical aesthetics']. The extensive system of concepts built around it can be recapitulated through his diaries and non-literary publications (Hankovszky 2011). The use of this adjective in naming Pilinszky's aesthetics is not accidental: he wants to make it clear

that the success of creation is unrelated to the abilities of the poet. "Evangelical" does not simply mean the aesthetics of the gospels' prose poetry (Pilinszky 1995: 23), but also that evangelical creation demands a specific spirituality from the poet. Furthermore, "evangelical" means that poetry itself is a form of *Imitatio Christi*, as Pilinszky says, "I feel that 'Imitatio Christi' is a universal concept, that is not only a religious, but also a moral and even aesthetic principle" [*'Az 'imitatio Christi', úgy érzem, egyetemes fogalom, s nemcsak vallásos, de morális, sőt esztétikai elv is'*] (Pilinszky 1999: 270). Pilinszky himself says that evangelical aesthetics is "dependent on Jesus, it exemplifies Jesus, how he was the only one who could inspect each and every case, human heart and misery with that incredible sight and love" [*'Jézus személyéhez kötött, példája Jézus, az a mód, ahogy egyedül ő tudott hallatlan kritikával és szeretettel megvizsgálni egy eléje kerülő esetet, emberi szívet, emberi nyomorúságot'*] (Pilinszky 1999: 199). These quotes also refer to Pilinszky's view that poetic practice is provided for not by the artist's own abilities, but an external (transcendental) effect. According to Pilinszky's approach to creative imagination, the artist is a passive participant. As Pilinszky himself says, "What we call 'creative imagination' is nothing else than the submission of imagination: passive creation.... As my choice of words suggests, I deem art to be essentially religious in its origin: this may be the reason why I treat every religious work of art—masterpieces, too—as a kind of paraphrasing" [*'amit mi 'teremtő képzetnek' nevezünk, nem egyéb, mint a képzelet odaadása: passzív teremtés.... Amint azt szóhasználatom máris elárulja, számomra a művészet alapvetően vallásos eredetű, s talán innét, hogy minden kifejezetten vallásos művet—remekművet is—bizonyos értelemben parafrázisnak érzek'*] (Pilinszky 2015: 87).

Artistic creation as an action means reliance on Divine grace, which may suggest T. S. Eliot's definition of the artist as a medium, although Pilinszky does not refer to the artist as a 'receptacle' in which impressions may synthesize (Eliot 1958: 17-21), but as a *rádiótorony* ['radio tower'] that fulfils the role of relaying (Pilinszky 1999: 237, 266). Pilinszky's metaphor of the "radio tower" is connected to his concept of poetry as *Imitatio Christi* (as mentioned above), in that poetry is focused on Christ. Poetry as an act is subjugated neither to the poet's ability to create, nor to the poet's command over language but is subjugated to the manifestation of God. This is why Pilinszky says that the role of the poet is similar to that of a radio tower: one has to relate Christ—and in relaying Christ, one must also follow Christ, as explained in the relevant quote above (Pilinszky 1999: 270). *Imitatio Christi* is an aesthetic and a moral concept at the same time. Thus, for Pilinszky, poetry is not simply an act, but a form of conduct.

Artistic creation has a metaphysical importance, as according to Pilinszky, with the fall of Man described in the Book of Genesis, not only the sense and will of mankind was corrupted – as it is taught by Catholic dogma, but also mankind's imagination. In Pilinszky's opinion, the role of this imagination should be the constant realizing (incarnation) of the world. In Catholic theology, 'incarnation' means the embodiment of Christ, but Pilinszky uses the concept much more liberally, as the efficiency of art meaning not only the realization, but also the redemption of past events. Thus, for Pilinszky, artistic representation of a past event was not only an embodiment (or reincarnation) of said event, but also a redemptive act for that event. The concept of evangelical aesthetics evokes two scholarly questions: whether it is possible to interpret the concepts of incarnation and redeeming the irredeemable (Mártonffy 2015, Hankovszky 2011: 113-121), and whether these aesthetic observations of the artist may become readable, that is to say, whether they are valuable objects of aesthetic analysis focusing on audience response.

Pilinszky's mysticism focuses on Christ, and subordinates poetic practice to Divine grace, claiming the inseparability of mysticism and poetry. As the poet himself says,

A lot of people write about the relationship between poetic creation, or more specifically, poetic inspiration and mystic elation. In essence, these two walks the same road, though using two narrow pathways, walking in the opposite direction. The descending path of God who condescends by creation and incarnation is the path of poetry; the ascending path is that of mysticism. Naturally, this does not exclude the mystic possibilities of poetry and the poetic possibilities of mysticism. After all, similarly to the ladder of Jacob, the two opposing movements on this road are one and the same, just as Godly love and neighborly love are one and the same.

[*'Sokat írtak a költői alkotás, közelebbről a költői ihlet és a misztikus elragadtatás rokonságáról. Lényegében ugyanazt az utat járja mindkettő, csupán ugyanannak a keskeny útnak ellenkező oldalán, s ellenkező irányában haladva. A teremtésben és a megtestesülésben alászálló Istenség útjának lefele szálló ága: a költészeté, a fölfele szálló ága: a misztikáé. Ami persze nem zárja ki a költészet misztikus és a misztika költői lehetőségeit. Hiszen ezen az úton—mint Jákob lajtorjáján—végül is mindkét mozgás egy és ugyanaz, ahogyan az istenszeretet és a felebaráti szeretet is egy'*] (Pilinszky 1999: 622-623).

According to the aforementioned quote, both poetic inspiration and mystic ecstasy presumes that God's turn towards man anticipates man's search for God. Thus, God descends to man, to seek connection. Due to God's anticipating approach, the same gesture of accepting and receiving this approach is applied by both mysticism and poetry. The difference between the two is in the orientation that follows this acceptance: mysticism turns "upwards," towards God, whereas poetry orients itself "downwards," to the created world. In the quoted paragraph, this orientation-based differentiation is not deemed necessary. Here, Pilinszky tries to stress that due to the acceptance of God's approach, the two aspects are essentially one and the same. (The author of this article has already discussed the merge of mysticism and poetry in more detail according to the example of Godly love and neighborly love in a previous study: Szmeskó 2019: 97-107.)

The merging of Pilinszky's evangelical aesthetics and the coalescence of mysticism and poetry has not been analyzed in previous scholarly studies. Due to space limitations, I can discuss only one aspect of this field: the problem of obedience, forfeiture and impersonality, which can be described via Pilinszky's short poem, *In memoriam F. M. Dosztojevskij* [*In Memoriam F. M. Dostoevsky*].

Bow. (Bends over.)  
Straighten up. (Rises.)  
Take off your shirt and pants.  
(Takes off both.)  
Reflect.  
(Turns away. Reflects.)  
Put clothes back on.  
(Puts clothes back on.)

[Translated by: Gellért Hujbert]

[*Hajoljon le. (Földig hajol.)*  
*Álljon föl. (Fölemelkedik.)*  
*Vegye le az ingét, gatyáját.*  
*(Mindkettőt leveszi.)*  
*Nézzen szembe.*  
*(Elfordúl. Szembenéz.)*  
*Öltözzön föl.*  
*(Föltözik.)]*

(Pilinszky 2015: 144)

Pilinszky's reduction of the lyrical self reaches its zenith in this poem. The fragmental, free-flow nature that appears in this poem, rejecting the structured possibility of "entirety," the totality of visualization, is characteristic of his later poems. Pilinszky does not refuse, however, the possibility of expression and utterance but deems fragmentality and the representation of seemingly unimportant, neglected objects as tools of visualization. The visual arrangement of the text describes the one-sided dialogue as the structure of the poem. The time of publication (1973), title, structure and the situation within suggests that the poem refers not only to the fact that Fyodor Dostoevsky was granted mercy right before his execution (December 22, 1849, a scene which is described in Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*, thus also linking Pilinszky to the horizon of Dostoevsky's novels), but also to the sense of vulnerability experienced globally by mankind during the Second World War.

There is no lyrical self present in the text: that is to say, no narrator is speaking in the first person singular. One narrator gives orders, and the other obeys these orders mechanically. The scene is described quite sparingly. No objective change can be detected in the obeying person. Apart from the movements of bending and straightening, or the undressing and dressing, the only change that is perceivable by the observer during the entirety of the verse is the direction of gaze ("Turns Away. Reflects"). If we look at the inner mechanisms behind the acts of the obeying person, we see moments of humiliation and humility. The obeying person does not simply bow, but bends over, just as he undresses completely. The turning away happens in this naked state, before the clothes are then replaced. It is important that the state of openness and exposure that



comes from bareness takes up most of the poem (if we attribute the dimension of time to the succession of lines), and the turning happens exposed to the gaze of the observer, followed by the [redressing.] Superficially, no substantial change could be observed. (cp. Kálec-Simon 2015: 166-168., Hankovszky 2015, 294-299.)

Even though the ordering person also lacks detail, the orders are not given in a cruel, power-exerting rhetoric. There is no "must" or "have to," not even a "bow down" in the first line, it is a simple direction. This formal address is able to express respect towards the obeying person while maintaining a self-assertive voice. This rhetoric is utilized throughout the entire poem. The poem also uses only a simple set of repeated or synonymous words. This makes each and every aspect of expression and word use heavily accentuated. The asymmetric relationship of subordination is expressed through the modes of utterance and the acts of obedience described in bracketed lines. Based on the arguments above, I propose to shed light on a spiritual layer of meaning, while acknowledging that the text may be approached in several other ways.

If read through the observance of the Lord/servant relationship (taken not in a Hegelian, but in the theological sense), the lyrical self-mantles the subservient side, hiding behind the expressions of obedience (thus, appearing only indirectly), wherefore the line of actions enumerated in the poem may be understood as a way of spiritual purification that depicts the appearance before God. In this context, it becomes important that the initiator (and, in essence, the only speaker) of this one-sided dialogue is God, which not only refers to God's descending approach (as detailed above), but at the same time leaves the reader in doubt of whether the encounter described in the poem can be treated as an encounter; if so, in what sense was it an encounter? Whether the obeying person is left with any experience at all is an issue that also remains obscure.

As an encounter, the poem describes the steps of establishing contact. The gesture following the bowing in the second line (which, in this case, means respect and veneration) is not simply straightening one's back, but a *rising*, suggesting the possibility of entering into a higher dimension. This consequently leads to the understanding that the stripping of clothes corresponds with the bareness before the original sin, the openness to (spiritual) purity. The steps of bowing, rising and undressing prepare the actual encounter, which may be presented in the poem with the line, "Turns Away. Reflects." For the reader information about this encounter prepared by three steps may be gained only from the external position. Excluding the external observer evokes the classic understanding of mysticism, which states that the encounter with the numinous can never be linguistically articulated; indeed, it should not even be disclosed to the uninitiated. This indiscernibility and remoteness is supported by the closing line ("Puts clothes back on"), which suggests a return to the initial position of the obeying person.

From the perspective of Pilinszky's aesthetics, the poem described above may be read as the "event of God's condescending grace," in which man reacts with obedience to God's initiating gesture. This structure may conform to the melding of mysticism and poetry, where the creator is characterized by obedience to God. The concepts of creative imagination and the medium as described by Pilinszky's evangelical aesthetics may also be discovered in this structure. At the same time, the poem articulates the seclusion and inaccessibility of intimacy. *In memoriam F. M. Dosztojevszkij* ['In Memoriam F. M. Dostoevsky'] is an exceptional example of a peculiar attribute in Pilinszky's poetry: that in certain cases, the addressing voice and the addressed person are given a kind of general description that enables a fairly wide spectrum of interpretations.

The most recent edition of János Pilinszky's non-literary texts provided an occasion to highlight some of the major attributes of the captivating philosophy and aesthetic expressions of this Hungarian poet. Rather than a conclusive summary, the intentions of this article propose a poem that will hopefully inspire further interest in the reader.

Once Upon a Fine Day

Always the discarded tin spoon,  
The wastes of misery I have been looking for,  
hoping, that once upon a fine day  
I shall weep, and be gently readmitted  
by the old yard,  
the ivy silence and rustle of our home.

Always,  
Always, I have longed for home

[Translated by Gellért Hujbert]

[*Egy szép napon*

*Mindíg az elhánt bádogkanalat,  
a nyomorúság lim-lom tájait kerestem,  
remélve, hogy egy szép napon  
előnt a sírás, visszafogad szeliden  
a régi udvar, otthonunk  
borostyán csöndje, susogása.*

*Mindíg,  
mindíg is hazavágytam.]*

(Pilinszky 2015: 105)

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