



**Gábor Csordás**

## The body of the text

*Corporeal writing in Péter Nádas's "Parallel Stories"*

*Parallel Stories*, the new novel by Péter Nádas, is a virtuoso combination of nineteenth-century high realism with the experimentalism of the *nouveau roman*, says Gábor Csordás. The novel's four sets of interwoven narratives, spanning eastern and western Europe from the early 1960s to the fall of the Berlin Wall, are powered by the twin forces of politics and eroticism. But *Parallel Stories* is more than the sum of its plot lines: the real narrative is that of bodies' actions on one another, their attraction and desires, their mutual memories. This kind of "corporeal writing" is Nádas's great novelistic innovation.

"Quand tout mon corps ne tient pas la plume, je  
n'écris pas."

A. Thibaudet on Montaigne's way of writing,  
*Réflexions sur la littérature*

"I have never read its like as a novel" — that was how Csaba Károlyi started his review of *Párhuzamos történetek* [Parallel Stories]<sup>1</sup> in Hungary's premier literary weekly, *Élet és Irodalom*,<sup>2</sup> and I am borrowing it from him because I could hardly better it. Now that, after a long and fruitless resistance, and primarily thanks to the works of Péter Nádas, Péter Esterházy, and Imre Kertész, Hungarian literature has again become capable of registering changes in the human condition in real time, with the Péter Nádas' new novel it is telling the world to catch up.

The starting point that the life works of the three above-mentioned authors share with one another is a recognition of the problematic relationship that language bears to reality. It is, however, at one and the same time virtually the sole point of contact, and from there each of the three has blazed a trail for himself in a different direction.

With Esterházy, reality is imparted *within* language, and at first sight his is the most radical option, the most astonishing counter-thesis to the ordinary view and, equally, the most playful proposal, opening up a wide space for scintillating, subversive games of irony. His innovativeness is also superficially obvious, quick to draw imitators, while the postmodern citizen, condemned to enjoyment, all too readily falls into the trap that one can painlessly acquire a veneer of "culture" by reading his works.

#### Related links

**Gábor Csordás interviewed about Péter Nádas's *Parallel Stories* in Not Just a "Hungarian Sea", but Real Depth in Hungarian Literature Online.**

**Gabriella Györe**

[Péter Nádas. Portrait in Hungarian Literature Online.](#)

With Kertész, reality is imparted *despite* language; it is precisely in the throes of a language that is incapable of describing, communicating, or capturing it that its inescapable presence becomes so eerily palpable. Kertész strikes a narrow breach in language, and in that cramped space he constructs a world in which the only ones who will be able to find their bearings are those able to recognize his irony — that is, the shift and the fracture between the assertions of the text and their own experience of the world.

Nádas's option is reality *embodied in* language, to such an extent that the embodiment must increasingly be understood literally; it gradually occupies and transforms from within the forms of storytelling adopted by the author.

Nádas's first published work, the long short story *A Biblia* [The Bible], did not attract notice in 1965 for its innovativeness of style; to the contrary, the authentic depiction of reality in its every detail was celebrated as a resurrection of full-blooded realism in an era of complete discrediting and final decline of realism and the spread of the *nouveau roman*. In truth, only in retrospect can one see that it is tiny deviations in his use of inherited and canonized literary figures, such as the attention he devoted to insignificant gestures or the erotic charge of bodies which, taken individually, seem like possible variations but, taken together, were already then guided by a need to depict a radically different sort of reality and were prefiguring the possibility of a unique manner of writing that is fully consummated in *Parallel Stories*.

Already with the first novel, *The End of a Family Story* (1977), critics discerned the privileged role played in Nádas's prose by the recording and conveying of bodily states, though this was usually interpreted as a correction of traditional realist procedures. In short, it was considered to be the expression of a distinctive inwardness that served to counterbalance or neutralize the ideological slant inherent in the unavoidable processes of emphasis and selection: the inevitable directedness of attention is chopped up, broken up and ultimately suspended by the observing gaze's preoccupation with details.

Analyzing Nádas's 1986 novel, *A Book of Memories*, Zsolt Bagi, in his admirable recent book, *A körüllírás* [Circumlocution],<sup>3</sup> speaks of "corporeal writing" and "corporeal synecdoche", the fact that in the novel every event, in the first instance, is an event of bodies that act upon one another, preserving one another's actions and yearning for one another's actions. The text itself thereby becomes corporeal because the bodies' ceaseless actions on, and relations to, one another come to incorporate synecdochically their entire story and further ramifying system of relations, and every experience and situation thereby falls directly into a complex system of relationships of the novel's localities, characters, and historical contexts. The collocation of antecedents and consequences, situations and circumstances in corporeal synecdoche deprives narration and description, the traditional modes of storytelling, of their constitutive significance, or rather causes them to merge into one another (narrating the history of the collocation is the same as describing the collocation, and describing the collocation, the same as narrating the history of the collocation). It is a way of writing to which Bagi — extending the meaning of another rhetorical figure — applies the term *periphrasis*. This is a way of writing that "dissolves the simple structure of signifier–signified and attempts to circumlocute the signified with a complex of signifiers that by themselves never designate the signified but in their aggregate designate a place in which the signified becomes representable without pointing directly at it." Periphrasis in this sense comes about when, for instance, transitive verbs are lined up in a

lengthy sequence of sentences without an object being specified in the whole sequence. The propositions expressed by the transitive verbs therefore cannot set off toward either narrating something or describing something, but instead form a collocating complex of signifiers that in aggregate designates the place of a signified.

Strictly speaking, of course, what is at work in this example is the other rhetorical figure of *ellipsis*. Nádas virtually never utilizes *periphrasis* in the classical form; in most cases he creates the effect of circumlocution by other means (thus, the principle of *periphrasis* extends to *periphrasis* itself). Given that a text unfolds over time, textual places like this do not nail interpretation to a fixed signified but they facilitate precisely that continual shift — or as Bagi puts it, "slippage" and "creep" — whereby individual sites in the text are not linked up sequentially, but every site has subsumed to it a continually changing collocation of all other sites.

Another periphrasis that Nádas carries out by means of ellipsis is the use of comparisons without a comparator; but the same goal is also served by another classical rhetorical figure, *litotes*. Nádas is particularly fond of the form that asserts something by negation. Understatement is a device of ironic scepticism *par excellence* and as such serves to weaken the apodeictic weight of an assertion. When I say that something is "not easy" then I am merely opening up a place for the assertion of difficulty. This form of litotes also opens up a space for a certain degree of "slippage" and "creep", for a person who says something is "not easy" is not stating how difficult it is. From another angle, even in this simple case the opening space is invaded to some degree by a force which has the feel of reality, since the determination of meaning is being entrusted, as it were, to the logical structure of the world. (This is what Zsolt Bagi refers to as "the constitution of meaning", as opposed to "the constituted meaning".) Of course, an even wider space is opened up in Nádas's sentences, and even more frequently, by the sort of understatement that leaves divergent alternative interpretations open. The expression "she was not pleased", for instance, might mean "she was sad", "she was angry", "she lost heart", and so on.

At the level of the paragraph, the term "periphrasis" can only be applied metaphorically.<sup>4</sup> The more complex structures that come into being at the level of the paragraph (periodic sentences here) might be better summarized under the term *déplacement*. In the example that Bagi examines,<sup>5</sup> the displacement can be captured in the fact that the logical relationships of the assertions contained in the periodic sentences and the conjunctions that connect them cannot be reconciled with one another. The phenomenon may nevertheless be interpreted as periphrasis, at least figuratively, because with Nádas *déplacement* also serves for opening up places that make possible the encroachment of forces with the feel of reality. In *A Book of Memories*, however, this level cannot be examined separately, for there every paragraph forms a sentence. This probably explains why in Bagi's analysis the various procedures are uniformly subsumed under the concept of periphrasis, and why periphrasis is not sufficiently distinguished from "corporeal writing".

It should not be forgotten that the narratives of *A Book of Memories* are in principle dealing with exemplarily closed groups of individuals who are living in one another's spheres of erotic attraction. The triangles and quadrangles created by erotic desire and jealousy form islands in everyday life where attention directed at the body's otherwise repressed manifestations possesses a certain legitimacy. As a result, everything that the body transmits breaks

through the interpretative threshold with relative ease. In addition, the structure of *A Book of Memories* is dominated, at the highest level, by evocative memory. What transpires in the evocation is the dislocation, interpretation, and elaboration of memory — the transformation of the world's impersonal resistance into a first-person narrative; this is part of the individual's continuous effort to delimit itself, to create its own identity. This double play of interpretations now evokes, now disperses the ghost of constituted sense, of an explanation of the world outside the text. Maybe that is why in this novel circumlocution (and along with that the sentence) also extends to the level — that of the paragraph — that the dynamic of corporeal writing articulates. This may well be the explanation for the conspicuous frequency of lengthy sentences and their peculiar features, for the sentences are not in truth lengthy but spacious, securing the space for circumscription.

It is an essential feature of *A Book of Memories* that the chapter level creates a boundary that blocks the propagation of corporeal synecdoche, so that the next chapter belongs to another narrative. The novel is based on a dual constitution, on the linking of a deconstructive movement and a construction, or to put it another way: remembering in *A Book of Memories* has a dual function. Bodily memory, arising in the senses, gains expression at the level of the sentence and paragraph, whereas evocative memory, as already mentioned, is articulated at the chapter level. With Nádas, bodily memory is an uncontrollable sweeping of desire through the body, an undermining and overwhelming of consciousness in which the collocation of every lived and hoped-for moment is achieved. Evocative memory arranges the moments into the structure of a personal perspective, while bodily memory incessantly shifts, dissolves, breaks through, disperses, or suspends that perspective. The separation of the narratives, the fiction of parallel memoirs, the use of a privileged first-person-singular narrator makes *A Book of Memories* — like Proust's magnum opus — a novel of the creation of personal identity and, ultimately, of becoming a writer. The corporeal writing that internally structures the individual narratives, suspends the personal perspective and dissolves the boundaries of the narrating subject makes it an outstanding work of world literature.

Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of *Parallel Stories*, and the innovation that will be a surprise even for those familiar with Nádas's whole oeuvre, is its staggering multiplicity of essentially independent stories, which no realist construction would be able to embrace within a single narrative. *A Book of Memories* already contained three essentially independent parallel histories, forming four narratives: two memoirs, the manuscript of a novel, and a commentary. The four narratives are linked into a single novel by faintly-marked, text-world fictions such as the narrator of the two memoirs also being the author of the novel manuscript, and the author of the commentary also being a main figure in one of the memoirs.

It would be hard to group the stories in the new novel, not just because they merge — just how will be seen later on — into a single narrative, nor just because they are beyond count in the same way as one would be unable to count how many people one has met in one's life, but also in the sense that it is hard to tell which particular strand in a given web of events can be considered a story. One is sometimes left clueless even as to whether one is dealing with one story or two, while other stories depart from one another so markedly that one can only have recourse to vague speculations as to the links. One can only designate the uppermost point in the scale of stories, and if I now attempt succinctly to sum up — pointing out a few of the possible ramifications and links — the two most extensive stories, both spanning all three volumes of the

work, that may give some idea of how amazingly broad and intricate is the tangle attained in the stories, even taking the work's length into account.

One story looks back to Budapest in June 1960, continuing on 15 March 1961 (Hungary's national day) and the ensuing days. Its main protagonists are István Lippay–Lehr, an influential academic who has served political régimes of all stripes, his wife, Erna Demén, their son Ágost, Ágost's girlfriend, Gyöngyvér Mózes, who is training to become a singer, and Kristóf Demén, son of Erna's Communist elder brother, who was murdered by the Communists. In June 1960, Ágost and Gyöngyvér make love in the latter's sublet room; the tenant from whom the room is sublet, Mrs Irma Szemző née Arnót, walks in on them then later sets off to her regular card–playing circle with her one–time grammar–school classmates, Countess Mária Szapáry, the répétiteur Margit Huber (Gyöngyvér's singing teacher) and Izabella Dobrovan, who used to be a ballerina and is now a textile designer (in other words at least three other stories that in turn connect with further ones). Ágost and Gyöngyvér talk to one another about their childhood (two more stories that in turn connect with further ones), then Gyöngyvér practices beside the piano in Mrs Szemző's living room (weaving into the description of the living room the start of the extended story of Alajos Madzar, a Bauhaus–trained architect who designed the apartment as a favour for Mrs Szemző).

That night, Kristóf wanders excitedly around the park of Margaret Island, then a secret place for (strictly proscribed) homosexual cruising, lusting for a well–built male gypsy, the "giant". He catches sight of Pisti, a childhood friend, who fought with a weapon in the 1956 uprising (another story) and in 1957 was hauled out of a children's summer camp in the GDR by the Hungarian secret police, and who now presumably is working for them as an informer. Kristóf injures himself in getting away, and next to the Grand Hotel on Margaret Island he recalls the time in the late 1940s when he spent several weeks with his grandparents in what was then still very much an elegant upper middle–class milieu (and its demimonde of maids and those who had gone down in the world: another story). He encounters the "giant" again in a public lavatory and, enthralled, surrenders his body to erotic games.

On 15 March 1961, Lippay–Lehr is dying in hospital. His wife has herself taken to the hospital by taxi in order to pay a last visit and get him to sign an important contract of sale. She is accompanied by Gyöngyvér Mózes, with the pulls of erotic attraction and social animosity fluctuating between the two in the cramped confines of the taxi. Ágost meanwhile has dropped in on one of Budapest's atmospheric swimming baths, along with Hans von Wolkenstein and André Rott. Previously, all three were spies for Communist intelligence agencies in the West; now they are working for the central news agency, translating confidential documents into the various Western languages that they know. Rott receives an instruction from the prime minister's all–powerful personal secretary (a typically shadowy key post in the hierarchy of the Communist party–state) to prepare the way for Ágost to be deployed abroad again. The secretary subsequently learns that Countess Szapáry, with whom he was in love (unrequited) and who hid him during the 1944–45 persecution of the Jews in Budapest, had that very morning ended the life of her long–paralyzed lover, Elisa Koháry, then taken her own life.

Kristóf, in the meantime, makes up his mind to set up a meeting with Klára Vay (daughter of Elemér Vay, a former government commissioner who prepared the way for the deportation of Hungary's provincial Jewry to the extermination camps: another story), the seller of a sweet shop that he has long

had his eyes on from the window of his flat on the Grand Boulevard. The meeting comes off, and afterwards he and Klára's husband (presumably a member of the secret police) participate in an orgiastic party, in the middle of which Klára aborts and ends up in hospital. Kristóf nurses her with loving devotion and meanwhile takes steps to recover an expensive fur coat that Klára had borrowed from Andria von Lüttwitz (daughter of Freiherr von Lüttwitz, a German staff officer who emigrated to Budapest after the installation of the Weimar government in 1919: another story) and which was stolen during the party. Lippay–Lehr dies in the meantime. On orders from above, Ágost suddenly marries Gyöngyvér Mózes, following which they set off on their "honeymoon", during which he disappears without trace at an airport, together with a file of Eichmann documents that had been entrusted to him (Hungarian intelligence thereby get round the problem of handing over to the Israeli authorities documents that they had requested, without actually doing so).

The second story goes back to 1987 and takes place in Berlin, Düsseldorf, and Pfeilen in 1989, the year the Berlin Wall fell. Its Pfeilen–born main protagonist, the young German Carl Maria Döhring, is fascinated by a dark family history which relates to the bestial murder of prisoners at a forced–labour camp outside Pfeilen and the gold fillings that were wrenched from the prisoners' teeth (this is a separate story, but Pfeilen, which lies on Germany's border with the Netherlands, forms a meeting point during the final weeks of the Second World War, through which numerous story strands pass without crossing one another). In 1987, during his first year at university in Berlin, Döhring comes across a lake that he had formerly known from a painting and which he never finds again; he later buys some special coloured underpants for himself in a fetishist underwear shop. He has a serial dream in which he lives through the final moments of the liquidation of the Pfeilen forced–labour camp from the viewpoint of two surviving prisoners. As the first of these dream personas, he murders his own grandfather, Hermann Döhring, a camp guard, with a sharply pointed stake. As the second, the monks of a monastery in the nearby Dutch town of Venlo endeavour to save his life and he is interrogated by André Rott, then still an officer in British intelligence. When the monks try to extricate him from the prison shoes that have rotted to his feet, in his dream Carl Döhring soils his pants. Before Christmas in 1989, during a run at daybreak in the Berlin Tiergarten, he comes across the corpse of a middle–aged man. He gives a statement to detective Dr Kienast, then travels via Düsseldorf to Pfeilen, with his behaviour becoming ever more disturbed. Dr Kienast, who has lighted upon a number of clues that point to the possibility of the young man having had something to do with the unknown man's death, pays a visit on Döhring at his grandfather's farmstead near Pfeilen. We do not learn the end of the story, but there are faint suggestions that the murder was sexually motivated and that the victim might be Ágost, who vanished at Athens airport.

Even this brief and very incomplete exposition makes the novel seem much more *Romanesque* than it actually is, since I have had to reconstruct the stories, that is to say, place them at the centre of my narrative, which in this case means a good deal more than just "straightening out" the chronology and restoring the continuity. In reality, the novel's single big narrative does not relate these stories but the big story of bodies' actions on one another, the attraction they exert on one another, the desire they direct toward one another, and the memory they preserve of one another. During the course of the proliferating corporeal synecdoche, junctions are formed linking things that happened to different people at the same time and in the same place (sensing the other body), or at the same time but in different places (desire for the other

body), or in the same place but at different times (the body's memory of an apartment, house, and town), or else to the same person at different times and in different places (memory of one's own body). This progression of the narrative from junction to junction then projects into the reconstructing imagination a web of stories that forms a reality beyond the text. The principle that operated as "periphrasis" in *A Book of Memories* here permeates the whole structure, even appearing at its uppermost level and thus a long way from the level of the sentence, where it functioned as a rhetorical figure. It is a principle that truly permeates the whole way of writing and subordinates the inherited rhetorical, poetic, and epic devices for its own purposes. The tangle of stories, being a product of the reconstructing imagination, is both in theory and practice inexhaustible (and thus unlike a model); that is why it is able to create a world beyond the text that has been called into being from nothing and yet — as will be seen — one that accurately corresponds to real-life facts that are, socio-historically speaking, strictly defined and known or knowable to us. The manner in which this comes into being is this novel's greatest secret and simultaneously an achievement of world literary rank.

The form of corporeal synecdoche and the play of dual interpretation that characterized *A Book of Memories* would be unimaginable in this broad socio-historical sweep. Only in the most exceptional cases are the characters in this novel, with their ties to various historical eras, social strata, and cultures, able to observe and interpret the talk of their own and the other's body in the way that the protagonists of the previous novel did. At those times, in those places, in the cultures and social strata to which this fictional world extends, the body's talk and almost all its manifestations was illegitimate and subject to repression. That is not to say that the body is mute: erotic interaction, communication between body and body, is continual at all times and in all eras; it is just that, following the rules of our civilization, we fail to take cognizance of it, or we are unable to. The body, however, does take cognizance. Changes of blood flow in the cheeks, neck, and groin, body posture, the trembling of hands, muscles contracting or relaxing, odours emanating from the body's nooks and crannies, eyeball movements, the skin's dryness or dampness — all provide vital messages to another body. Even speech is not purely in the service of reason, for changes of rhythm, silences, pauses, modulations in tone and volume continually evade conscious control. Whatever the situation, the body always spots and understands what another body is communicating and responds appropriately. Repression is manifested in the fact that we do not admit to our consciousness what the other body has apprised our body of (and as a result we usually take no cognizance of the motives that actually control our actions).

From the very beginning, Nádas has been a matchless observer of the body's communications, and it is thanks to this that he has been able to convey incredibly complex states of emotion and consciousness purely with these means. In one scene in the first volume, for instance, a woman ticket collector at the Lukács Baths deeply humiliates a young cubicle attendant, stripping him of all human dignity, and under the impact of an affront which he is unable to process, the boy has an epileptic fit. Throughout the whole scene no more than a handful of banal utterances are spoken; the chain reaction of bodily gestures culminating in the affront is such that its basis is a profound interest of the bodies in one another. In order that such a scene should come about, however, it is necessary for the body-talk to become the language of the narrative and for the text to become corporeal writing. In *Parallel Stories*, a third person is needed in order for this to happen. Everything that the novel's protagonists necessarily disregard can only become part of the textual world through an

observer. Since what is at stake in *Parallel Stories* — unlike *A Book of Memories* — is not the unfolding of an individual perception of the world out of the world's noise, the jumble of sensations, impressions, and happenings, the perspectival relation that the observer has with the textual world is neither here nor there. It is neither here nor there that throughout the first volume, Kristóf Demén features in the third person singular, then in the first person singular, as a kind of indirect quotation,<sup>6</sup> going on, after some wavering, to establish himself permanently as a first-person-singular narrator, albeit with the interjection of a "he later said about himself"<sup>7</sup>, which leaves open the possibility of interpreting everything that follows as indirect quotation. It is neither here nor there not because, as has been seen, Nádas works this transition into the text in masterly fashion, nor because he might have stayed with either of the two versions; this "neither here nor there" is, so to speak, a logical consequence of the proliferation of corporeal synecdoche and at the same time an essential precondition for the creation of the novel's world.

The possibility that is left open of the whole text being interpretable as the narrative of a single privileged person allows the entire text to be subsumed to a single sensual space, and as a result the corporeal writing can become a formative principle for the whole work, rendering superfluous any previous construction that might be identified as a definite narrative structure. At the same time, this single, grammatically weakly-marked narrator is also plunged, as a continually degrading constraint, into the play of sociohistorical forces mediated by the body, and thus the sensual space distinguished by him is also not a space where the process of creating an individual's identity can go ahead, but the place that these sociohistorical forces manage to wrest for themselves in the interaction of bodies.

Socio-historical forces exert an influence on the body not only through the mediation of other bodies, however. Their directly deforming, stigmatizing influence is a recurrent motif in this novel. The narrator is enthralled to record wartime injuries and amputations, numbers tattooed on the forearm, or the rash of *lupus erythematosus* on the forehead of Klára Vay's husband. Furthermore, the civilized spaces that bodies occupy — apartments, houses, town quarters, towns, even paintings — are in this novel capable of coming across as "bodies", of inducing "slippage" and "creep" through a sense of the corporeal, as with the Leistikow painting for Carl Döhring (incidentally, Nádas's brilliant 1986 essay on Caspar David Friedrich, under the title "Melancholy", is also based on an analysis of the bodily sensations that arise in pictorial spaces), or with the town of Mohács, the proverbial site of Hungary's "national misfortunes", for a number of the novel's characters.

When it comes to houses, it is noteworthy how much space Nádas devotes in the novel to two architectural utopias — and it is perhaps unnecessary for me to say, in light of the foregoing, that these are equally utopias of human bodily existence. The Lippay-Lehr family's house on the Grand Boulevard is a realization of the ideal of building from the inside out, the work of Ágost and Kristóf's great-grandfather, Samu Demén, whose person and fate at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century forms one of the novel's smaller stories. Samu Demén does not become a successful architect; he gets ahead in life as a building contractor and inventor; his utopia is an example of the modernizing hopes that were inspired by Hungary's massive economic boom around the turn of the last century. Yet, despite even this boom, the country's ossified feudal structures could not be dismantled. Alajos Madzar's architectural utopia is far more modest in aim, relating to the humanization of the architecturally bungled space in which Mrs Szemző's psycho-analytic

consultation room is located (the room's furniture is later tossed out of the window, during the Second World War, by fascist thugs of the Arrow–Cross party). One can discern in Madzar's utopia the short–lived illusions of the new, European–oriented intelligentsia of the 1930s.

However idle the hopes on which they were based, these utopias nevertheless run right through *Parallel Stories*. One could say that the novel's distinctive manner of writing and structure is even able to stand some utopist loading, though it would perhaps be more correct to say that it dissolves — absorbs and assimilates — utopias into its own substance. To the extent that the observer's viewpoint does not become the perspective organizing the textual world, the novel's sole demonstrable ideological presupposition, strictly speaking, remains excluded. This is the characteristically "68er" idea that there is a link between the civilizational suppression and social repression, which with Nádas, as with others, now points towards a radical critique of civilization (see his 1991 essay "On Heavenly and Earthly Love"), now toward social emancipation, depending on whether the link is interpreted as one of identity or synergism. To the extent that the observer's viewpoint is nevertheless a constituent of the textual world — after all, precisely what in the textual world is brought into being, and how, is determined by what and how the observer observes — the corporeal synecdoche, as suppressed speech, also transmits the patterns of social repression. The novel world's temporal and spatial extent and its consequent diversity on the one hand, and its socio–historical determination of the corporeal synecdoche on the other, is roughly what I referred to above as the novel's biggest secret. Zsolt Bagi has referred to Nádas's new realism in connection with *A Book of Memories*. To my way of thinking, with *Parallel Stories* we have a work that takes seriously, and answers, all the questions posed by the breaking–up of classical realism, the fin–de–siècle's innovative experiments and the *nouveau roman*, while at the same time standing comparison with the greatest works of nineteenth–century high realism.

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<sup>1</sup> *Párhuzamos történetek* [Parallel Stories] Budapest: Jelenkor 2005.

<sup>2</sup> *Élet és Irodalom*, No. 46, 18 November 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Zsolt Bagi, *A körülírás* [Circumlocution], Budapest: Jelenkor 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The distinction between the levels of sentence, paragraph and chapter derives from Nádas's essay on "Form and Textual Structure", in: *Esszék*, Budapest: Jelenkor 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Bagi, op. cit. 110.

<sup>6</sup> Nádas, op. cit. vol. 2, 10

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 19

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