

Babits and the crisis of language - the moments when the idol of language is falling down

The perspective of this paper is going to be from a post-structuralist theoretical background which accounts for the discerned concept of the subject. Julia Kristeva, whose name is strongly related to this discourse, stated that our age is a therapeutic one in which we must face up to our problems”,¹ and this statement is akin to what Beckett once said: “The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess”.² The problem of a crisis in this view therefore is of an epistemological kind.

Structuralists had used the considerations of semiotics and linguistics to find and establish order everywhere; while the Post-Structuralists investigated language and signifying systems to argue that all such orders are founded on an essential prevalent disorder in language and in the world that can be never totally mastered by any structure, and that all seemingly solid and coherent systems are grounded in ideologically determined, socially specific metaphysical values and categories.³

So language is in the centre of this examination taking into account its arbitrary and contingent and referential character too. Kristeva affirms not only the possibility but also the necessity of maintaining language’s referential function, without which the subject could not have access to or practical knowledge of itself or the material world.⁴ The discourse of psychoanalysis provides us with an elaborate theory in connection with the question of reality and the subject, and it has played a crucial role in the shift from the homogenized Cartesian transcendental subject to the complex theory of the heterogeneous postmodern subjectivity.

In the contemporary situation of crisis, which, according to Kristeva, we are now faced with two choices: withdrawal from the human or rehabilitation of the revolt and survival.⁵

A Hungarian classic poet and a humanist, Babits Mihály’s poetry serves as a basis for my examination, with the help of some of his poems I try to show up some textual mechanisms where exactly those fixed points are becoming unstable and questioned which will be so

¹ Sylvie Gambaudo, “Absence and Revolt: The Recent Work of Julia Kristeva,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 17 (2000), 105.

² Anthony Uhlmann, *Beckett and Poststructuralism*. CUP, 1999, 110.

³ Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, “The Class of 1968 – Post-Structuralism *par lui meme*,” in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan eds. *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 334.

⁴ Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, 125.

⁵ Gambaudo, 106.

common in the postmodern sphere. Babits is an emblematic figure of the Hungarian classical modernist era, which period of our literature is signalled with the “Every whole has broken” sentence of Ady.

Kristeva has already shown us how a non-linguistic, fluid sphere could break into the order of language and question its totality this way. My intention is to show up another sphere where language seems to weaken as being a signifier, but not from the inner (Freudian) heterogeneousness of the subject, but from outside, from where, by losing a fixed point of reflection, it cannot locate itself any longer. These result in a changed experience of the world, a questioning of a once stable relationship between self and the outer space, and resulting in grotesque and sometimes threatening solutions in these texts.