

Approaching personality through style:  
The seriously perplexing figure of Dezső Szabó

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The Horthy years in Hungary (1920-42), though artistically alive and active, were far from a golden age. ‘Public life was barren [...] and often squalid. The injustice of Trianon compounded the bitter humiliation of military defeat, eating like a canker into national morale and public morality. Two threads ran through every segment of the public spectrum save for the socialist left: revision (of Trianon) and anti-Semitism.’<sup>1</sup>

The first dozen or so years of this period seem to have been the ideal setting for Dezső Szabó (1879-1945), who enjoyed a level of popularity high enough to justify his boundless self-esteem and his messianic complex.<sup>2</sup> “Dezső Szabó is the most disconcerting figure in Hungarian literature: there is nothing good, nor anything bad, that one could not say of him,” writes Géza Hegedűs, with only some hyperbole.<sup>3</sup> More restrained is Joseph Reményi: ‘In those nightmare times [Szabó’s] voice sounded like that of a prophet. His Hungarian was interspersed with erratic phrases, thunderous images; his rhetorical personality, his ardor that was sincere and absurd, his fiery impatience made of him a kind of literary Danton.’<sup>4</sup> In this essay I try to demonstrate how Reményi is on target when he highlights Szabó’s use of language and conjoins it with Szabó’s personality.<sup>5</sup>

The range – one hesitates to call it ‘development’ – of Dezső Szabó’s thinking and writing over the course of his life is best seen in polyphonic, even paradoxical terms.<sup>6</sup> The salient features of his style are of typologically disparate, even diametrically opposed, kinds, but this fact comports well with the well-documented inconsistencies of his political, social, and aesthetic views and his emotional self-contradictions; as Gwen Jones notes, ‘His works bear the influences of social Darwinism and Friedrich Nietzsche, Otto Weininger, Catholic Modernism, nineteenth-century radical liberalism, race theory, and, finally, anti-Nazism.’<sup>7</sup>

The bulk of what has been written about Szabó’s work concentrates on its intent, content, or consequences: the political and ideological impact of the man has all but eclipsed the writing itself.<sup>8</sup> The most compendious treatment of Szabó’s life and work to date has been criticized for failing to discuss or even identify ‘the sources of Szabó’s impact on the youth and the intelligentsia [...] Nagy neglects to analyze those undercurrents in Hungarian society which could help explain Szabó’s popularity’.<sup>9</sup> Twenty-four years later, Gail Stokes attempted to account for some of these undercurrents. In her analysis, the ground was prepared, in post-Ausgleich Hungary, by the accommodation between the landed elite and ‘a significant number of a pariah bourgeoisie [= Jews] [...] Considerable political skill went into this accommodation, which like those in Germany and Japan meant establishing a government separate from the people it ruled, but it created a Hungarian political culture in which democracy was considered an inappropriate option.’<sup>10</sup>

All that is fine as far as it goes. The social and political context were probably necessary, but they were certainly not sufficient to bring about Szabó’s unprecedented

stature and influence over more than a generation (of males, at any rate). Since there must therefore be something individual, or idiosyncratic, about Szabó, something specific about the man, I shall concentrate here on him rather than on his time, first in a brief biographical sketch, and then in the remainder of the essay focusing specifically on the form of his language, which for convenience I call his *style*.

Dezső Szabó was born 1879 in Kolozsvár (Cluj), the eighth of eleven children not stillborn. His father, József, the son of a well-to-do master carpenter, attended the Kolozsvár Calvinist College and at fifteen fought in the War of Independence. He was a self-centred alcoholic local government clerk and an outstanding public speaker and reciter of verse.<sup>11</sup> Of Dezső's four older brothers, two died early, of diphtheria, and two became alcoholics. His mother, also of Calvinist stock, anchored all her hopes in her youngest son, seeing in him a potential 'redemptor' (her word) of the family line.<sup>12</sup> As was typical for a Calvinist household, the children all learned to sing and recite from the psalter by heart.<sup>13</sup> His mother enrolled him in the Calvinist College at the late age of eight, preferring to allow him the freedom to play and read on his own (by his own account, widely: alongside Hungarian masters such as Vörösmarty, Petőfi, and Jókai he mentions Jules Verne and Cervantes).<sup>14</sup>

In 1900-4, Szabó attended the Hungarian analogue to the *École Normale Supérieure*, the (József) Eötvös College in Budapest. Although he enrolled to study Hungarian and French, he came to concentrate on Finno-Ugric linguistics. In his autobiography he is for the most part disdainful of his teachers, and derides, in particular, the study of languages and specifically Finno-Ugric ones. Szabó 'learned Finnish'—in the sense that he worked through and, in effect, memorized Szinnyei's short grammar—

over a weekend. He thereby astounded his tutors and classmates, but was himself dismissive of this feat: “What did [it] mean? [...] Quick uptake, good memory”.<sup>15</sup>

Szabó spent time in Paris (1905-6, and the summers of 1912 and 1913), but it had the paradoxical effect of helping to harden his rightward-leaning positions; particularly influential in this French intake were the figures of Gabriel Tarde and Maurice Barrès.<sup>16</sup> Szabó was a xenophobic francophile who deplored what he saw as the ubiquity of foreigners in his homeland, yet as we shall see he lardoned his prose with lexical foreignisms. On the other hand despite his francophilia he favoured Transylvanian *ösztön* “natural drive” over what he saw as French empty form.

Szabó explained his misanthropy by saying, tongue in cheek, that his ability to feel a kinship with his fellow human beings was precluded by the sheer mass of his passion for mountains, forests, and the sea (*Életeim* 1.614, where he declares himself an *erdő-alkoholista* ‘forest-alcoholic’ ). He also mused that it would have been better if, through contact with the miraculous peasant woman Mária Barnabás—whom he met while doing fieldwork on a Hungarian dialect—he had been reborn to become his fictional character János Böjthe (the protagonist of his infamous novel, *Az elsodort falu*). Nevertheless, Szabó will not allow himself the solace of melancholy; at best, his fits of exuberance merrily flail about, then flag into spite. His self-adoration was too great to be anything but ironic, yet he was too honest with himself to indulge in self-pity.

Szabó belonged to the brilliant ‘generation of 1900’, which included the cohort of writers, musicians, artists and thinkers who dominated Hungarian culture up to about

the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>17</sup> But Szabó never made real friends.<sup>18</sup> He never married, and died alone in January 1945, during the occupation of Budapest. To the last fascicle of his autobiography, on which he worked until his death, he gave the minimal-pair title, *Kor vagy kór?* “Period or Illness?”.

The key features of Dezső Szabó’s style are set out below.<sup>19</sup> To compress the discussion, examples have been selected for their aptness not only as illustrations of formal points, but also as throwing light on the complexities of Szabó’s personality. They are drawn primarily from three major works: his novels *Az elsodort falu* (1919) “The Village that was Swept Away” (hereafter: *AEF*) and *Csodálatos élet* (1921) “Miraculous Life” (hereafter: *CsÉ*) and his compendious, unfinished autobiography *Életeim. Születéseim, Halálaim, Feltámadásaim* “My Lives. My Births, My Deaths, My Resurrections”.<sup>20</sup>

While no one stylistic feature is uniquely his, the syndrome of all these features taken together stamps a text as unmistakably *szabódezsős* ‘szabóesque’. Usually no more than three or four clauses are enough to indicate which writer we are dealing with. In short, Szabó was a writer with a style as distinctive as that of, say, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett, or Henry Green.

The order of presentation is broadly from features of smaller to larger scope. A major caveat is in order, however. There will have to be considerable repetition, overlap, and back-eddying in my presentation. This is because of the mutually contradictory nature of grammatical categories: they are at once diverse and yet interconnected.<sup>21</sup>

Although the diverse features of Szabó’s (and any interesting writer’s) style belong to

widely divergent parts of the grammar and lexicon, these diverse parts are interconnected in complex ways, and Szabó in particular seems to have been fond of using stylistic features in various combinations.

In principle, then, we shall range from submorphemic figures—alliteration and other patterning of sounds and suprasegmentals—through word-level phenomena such as denominal verb derivation and lexis, to phrase-level constructions such as the attributive participle and the complex adjective. In connexion with these last two features, Szabó's noun phrase will receive especial attention, for it is here that he is most markedly deviant from other Hungarian writers of his or indeed any other generation. We then look at larger discourse strategies and syntagms: parataxis, triadic and tetradic, often rhopalic, and repetition-and-parallelism.<sup>22</sup> We also look briefly at Szabó's similes and metaphors, and how their structures pattern with other features of his style. Finally, we examine a few longer stretches of text, where we may see the patterning of many of these features pulling together – or apart.

**Alliteration** in its purest Hungarian form, that is, salient repetition of (particularly word-initial) consonants in etymologically unrelated words, is not particularly characteristic of Szabó's writing. But occasionally he will build sequences of three, as in *a vigasztaló valótlanságok világába* “into the world of consoling untruths”<sup>23</sup> (*AEF* 2.163) and, one page later and spanning constituents, *Milla múltba mártott lágy szavakat hullatott* “Milla uttered soft words dipped in the past”, *elgémberedett kis karjait kilökte a mostoha levegőbe* “she thrust her cramped little arms into the stepmother(ly) air” (both *AEF* 2.164). And note how in this sentence he combines alliteration of *r* with repetition of the root *reng-* ‘shake, quake’ (the example will also

serve as a window into his attitude to women): *Hatalmas fehérnép volt, rengett a föld alatta, és rengtek rajta roppant arányú rengősegei* “She was a tremendous woman, the earth trembled beneath her, and her huge-proportioned ‘tremulantitudes’ shook on her” (*Életeim* 1.514).<sup>24</sup>

**More variegated patternings of consonants, vowels and prosodies** occur, as a statistical necessity, with greater frequency. Phonological patterning seems to crop up especially in similes, and one often wonders whether one or both of the things compared have been chosen for the sounds occurring in the names of the words denoting them.<sup>25</sup> In the preface to *CsÉ* (1.11) we read that the “boundaries of the dark have opened wide”, and that it is “as if over endless black fields a sobbing train were hurtling”: *végtelen fekete mezőkön zokogó vonat rohanna*, with the phonological pattern  $\acute{e}$ -e-e  $\underline{e}$ -e-e  $\underline{e}$ -ő-ő |  $\underline{o}$ -o-ó  $\underline{o}$ -a-□  $\underline{o}$ -a-a<sup>26</sup>, wherein the weight of the penultimate syllables of the two cola (*zõ, an*) match because of the conditional morphology required by the irrealis (‘as-if’) comparison (*mezõ-k-ön : rohan-na*). Another example: intertwined with the *force-majeure* alliterations of the etymological figures *dült* “gushed” : *feldült* “overturned” and *belõle* “out of him” : *-ból* “out of” we have repeated *be, m, d, h,* and *or* in *dült belõle a mézes beszéd, mint hamis bor a feldült hordóból* “honeyed speech gushed out of him like balderdash wine from an overturned barrel” (*CsÉ* 2.250); especially noteworthy is the repeated phonetic sequence [žb] due to the collocations *mézes beszéd* ‘honeyed speech’ and *hamis bor* ‘false wine’, since the formal repetition echoes the metaphoric one comparing rhetoric with untruths. In *A homloka szemei felé vastag karimába nyúlt, mint eszterháj a gyilkos lebuja ablakaira* (*CsÉ* 1.226) the superorbital ridge of a pet simian is likened to the “eaves over the windows of a murderers’ den”. The repetitions of *m, b, l,* and *k* in

this simile are probably made more noticeable by the suggestion of the syllabic rhythm (7 + 7 + 7) of the last nine words. Similarly, when children hop down from the roof of a pigsty, their falling is compared to that of “shaken ripened crab-apples from a tree”: (*mint*) *megrázott érett vackor a fáról*. The segmental sound-bonds (labials *m*, *f*, *v*) here are weak, but if we hear the introductory *mint* ‘like’ as anacrustic their arrangement in two quinquisyllabic strings is audible (-uu-u). As we shall see, it is typically szabóesque, as well, to indulge in the heavy use of attributive participles (‘shaken’, ‘ripened’). But just as important is the fact that—as in the previous example—the comparison is not of nouns to nouns, children to crab apples, but of verbs to verbs, actions and motions to actions and motions. We shall return to Szabó’s verbs and comparisons in more detail below.

**Etymological figure** operates at the level of the phrase, clause, or even the sentence, but since it is based on the etymological identity of two or more roots it is treated here. The etymological figure is a venerable European trope, but it is also a mainstay of Hungarian and Ob-Ugrian folk verse (it occurs in the earliest Hungarian texts, both prose and verse). To try to define it narrowly would be counter-productive, since the forms it takes depend, intimately and intricately, on the texture of the lexicon of the language in question. For example in the English *A sower went out to sow his seed* (Luke 8:5), only the first two occurrences of the etymological root are apparent as cognates, and the similarity heard in *seed* seems, and synchronically is, no more than alliteration. In the Greek on the other hand the three terms were (and are) clearly cognate, and their cognacy is clear not so much because of their phonological similarities as because of the regular operation of ablaut processes in Greek word-formation.<sup>27</sup> In Hungarian, as in Latin, such processes are far fewer, and slavish

copying results in sequences which can sound mantric at best, at worst: monotonous and trite (*exiit qui <sup>1</sup>seminat <sup>1</sup>seminare <sup>1</sup>semen suum*). It is not surprising, therefore, that given the nature of Hungarian and given Szabó's early training in Finno-Ugric linguistics, his use of the etymological figure is often of a subtly playful, learned kind. His work with Mansi morphology doubtless made him aware of the kinds of meaning potential that play with lexicogrammar can unlock, and his exposure to Ob-Ugrian texts and their Hungarian translations may have coloured his sensitivity to sound and sense bonds in Hungarian vocabulary. For example, in *alv=ás=talan álm-ok* "sleepless dreams" (*AEF* 350), the roots *alv-* (*al=sz-ik*) 'sleeps' and *álm-* (*álm*) are etymologically connected, but synchronically are no more than paronyms.<sup>28</sup> In *oda|hetyké=l=ked-te-m az elő|tömeg=l=ő hegy-ek-nek* "I cockily went to meet the mountains half-way as they massed forth" (*Életeim* 455) (*hetyke* 'cocky, strutting, pert' is etymologically a derivate of *hegy* 'peak, mountain'<sup>29</sup>) the synchronic connexion is even less evident because of the divergence of the senses. This example also illustrates Szabó's predilection for attributive participles built to denominal verbs (*elő|tömeg=l=ő*, from *tömeg* 'mass, crowd', itself a derivate of *töm-* 'stuffs, crams') and his often aberrant use of verbal particles (*oda|* 'thither' converting a stative verb, *hetykélkedik* 'is cocky' into one of motion).<sup>30</sup> Further examples: *a kaján Káin* "malevolent Cain" (*Életeim* 77); *világtalan holt tenger volt a világ* "the world (*világ*) was a lightless, sightless (*világ=talan*) dead sea", *meleg meleget* "warm warmth" (both *Életeim* 390). This last example also illustrates Szabó's fondness for the unclear boundaries between adjective and noun in Hungarian, a trait it shares with its Ob-Ugrian congeners and which he treated in detail in his monograph on Vogul word-formation.<sup>31</sup> Examples: *olyan nagyon augusztus volt* "it was so very August" (*Életeim* 469); *Igen tanár vagyok ahhoz, hogy epikai lehessek* "I'm too much a teacher to be

able to wax epic” (*AEF* 353); *igen tanár* here is something like French *trop professeur*. Finally, consider *meg|le=het=ő=s=en meg|vagy-ok* “I’m pretty much all right” (*CsÉ* 2.154). As an etymological figure, this construction is a *tour de force*: it is based on Hungarian’s only suppletive verb pair, the copulas *lev-* (*le=sz-ek*) ‘becomes, is’ and *val-* (*vagy-ok*) ‘is’, both conjoined with the coverb *meg|*. What is striking here is that the adverb *meglehetősen* ‘rather, quite’ has developed senses remote from those of its lexicogrammatical pendant *meg|van* ‘X is present/available’; the figure in this way re-establishes, in quasi-philological fashion, their forgotten history, but with a twist: the register of both parts of the expression is fairly folksy, informal, or both.

We have already met with examples of Szabó’s **patterning of suprasegmentals** (rhythmic prose). Snatches of something that sounds like metre occur fairly frequently throughout his work, but in many cases it must be seen as a by-product, or at least a concomitant, of morphemic patterning. There is a puckish instance of this in his autobiography, when he describes the local yokels grouped to meet him as he descends, mock-Moses-like, from a walk on the nearby mountain: *alattam, a kis templom körül, falusi emberek álldogálnak, ki baltával, ki karóval, gereblyével, szénarúddal* “below me, around the little church, villagers stood around, some with hatchets, some with pikes, (some) with rakes, (some) with [rods used to carry haycocks]” (*Életeim* 1.481). The stress prominences of the last sixteen syllables of this sentence scan in a manner reminiscent of Hungarian translations of the *Kalevala*. Since Szabó has told us that he carried his copy<sup>32</sup> of the *Kalevala* with him on such walks, we are prepared to hear a Hungarian approximation to the metre of that work in the last six words of this sentence.<sup>33</sup>

At the level of the word, some attention must be paid to Szabó's distinctive **lexis**. Some of his aberrancies come ready-made: he is fond of using foreign words, especially if they are textually rare or odd in the context of Hungarian phonotactics, e.g. *mizogün*, with its highly non-canonic vowel sequence *i-o-ü*, for the calque (natively constructed) *nő+gyűlöl=ő* WOMAN+HAT=ING 'misogynist'. Because of the non-European origin of Hungarian core vocabulary, and because of non-European phonotactic constraints and processes such as vowel harmony and restrictions on consonant clusters, vocabulary of foreign origin stands out more clearly in Hungarian, even by its form alone, than foreign vocabulary in English or German. A few examples in context will help to make this clear. *Malterezgette épülő lelkemet* "she continued to mortar up my under-construction soul" (*Életeim* 1.72) with non-standard *malter=ez-* instead of standard, but still foreign, *malter=oz-* 'mortars, plasters'. *A sült után, mely valami exhumált vén tyúk mémoire d'outré-tombe-ja volt* "after the main course, which was the mémoire d'outré-tombe of some exhumed old hen" (*Életeim* 1.449); note the allusion to Chateaubriand's autobiography. *Az este úgy jött, mint egy csendesen sírt circumdederunt* "Evening came like a quietly wept circumdederunt" (*Életeim* 1.526). Szabó favours this word, not only because of its psalteric connexions (for example, *Psalmi iuxta LXX*, 17.5) but also for its occurrence in Jan Richafort's *Missa pro Defunctis* (1532); earlier in this work, he quotes an entire line from this text: *Circumdederunt nos gemitus mortis, dolores inferni circumdederunt nos* (*Életeim* 1.327); compare, also, in a passage wherein Szabó likens himself to a church-organ: (*az egész emberré zuhanó világ* "circumdederuntja"<sup>d</sup>)<sup>34</sup> *száll ki belőlem* "the *circumdederunt* of the whole into-becoming-a-human-being plummeting world soars out of me" (*Életeim* 1.439).

Another lexical feature of Szabó's style is his extreme favouring of particular words. In the absence of precise counts it is impossible to say which are his greatest favourites, but surely *magyar* 'Hungarian' *lélek* 'soul' and *élet* 'life' would be in the top half-dozen or so. Counts carried out on the digitalized version of *Életeim* found, out of an overall word count of 366,122, a full 977 instances of *magyar*, 1717 instances of *lélek*, and 2402 of *élet*; in effect, some form of *élet* occurs in this text on average once every 152 words. Similar counts based on the digitalized text of *AEF* found similar results (out an overall word count of 171,662): *élet* 917, *lélek* 458, and *magyar* 323, meaning that in this text forms built from these three words constitute just under one percent (0.989%) of the whole, that is: nearly every hundredth word is one of this trio.<sup>35</sup>

The szabóesque stylistic trait which is most often cited in the literature is his penchant for creating new verbs from nominals, using verbal particles in novel ways, or both.<sup>36</sup> Szabó himself claimed to have 'verbified' Hungarian prose style.<sup>37</sup> Szabó's use of verbs is probably his most frequent metaphorical method; he thereby achieves a kind of double density, compressing on two planes simultaneously: morphology and metaphor. Examples: *fel|hold+világ=l-ott* "began to shine (like) the moon" (*hold+világ* 'moon'+ 'light') (*AEF* 1.96, said of the skull beneath the skin of a young man's nape); *bele|vihar=oz-ta-d minden akaraterődöt* "you packed ('stormed') all your willpower into it" (*vihar* 'storm') (*Életeim* 1.318; there is an intransitive verb *vihar=z-ik* 'storms'); *sör=öz-zük ki belőle a félszet* "let's 'beer' the fear out of him" (*Életeim* 1.630; there is an intransitive verb *sör=öz-ik* 'drinks beer', but, as in the previous example, Szabó makes from it a transitive verb (of motion, expressed by the coverb *ki* 'out'); *fel|harsoná=z-ta az izmait* "[the air of the Transylvanian

countryside] pumped (‘trumpeted’) up my muscles” (*Életeim* 1.615). Notice that Szabó’s verbs are interesting at the syntactic level, as well: in the last three examples he builds applicatives<sup>38</sup> by the addition of a verbal particle (*bele|, ki|, fel|*), thereby rendering normally intransitive verbs transitive and thus inserting a new object argument (willpower, fear, muscles) into the clause.

Also characteristic are verbs of motion built from nouns:<sup>39</sup> *rá|lidérc=ül-* (*lidérc* ‘nightmare, succubus’), *rá|vámpír=kod-* (*vámpír* ‘vampire’), both referring to motion of these entities onto something else, in the later case: of the Christian Church onto “the Jewish body”.<sup>40</sup>

Szabó’s morphological bravura is not limited to verbs. In the nominal paradigm, for example, the Hungarian **translative** case, which has functional (if not etymological) analogues in most branches of the Uralic languages, encodes change of state, as in *borz-zá* ‘(changed) into a badger’. Textually it is fairly rare in Hungarian, but Szabó is inordinately fond of it, partly no doubt because its use comports well with other grammatical features of his style, such as applicatives, but partly, also, because it implies change and the dynamic, and therefore motion.<sup>41</sup> Examples: *borússá búsított* “it saddened me [into becoming] gloomy” (*Életeim* 1.647; note, in passing, the alliterative pattern with *b-s-* interlocking with repetition of *-ú-*); *Hagytam, hogy a világ Szabó Dezsővé legyen bennem a maga tetszése szerint* “I let the world become Dezső Szabó inside me, as it pleased” (*Életeim* 1.523). Combined with etymological figure: *él=t él=et-té szabadítottak* “(which) they had freed (to become) a lived life” (*Életeim* 1.479).

**Comparatives and superlatives** are not normally in themselves considered to be stylistically noteworthy, but it is suggestive that Szabó recalled his mother's treatment of gradations of the adjective as lyrical (*Életeim* 1.92). He often forms comparatives (suffix *-bb*) or superlatives (circumfix *leg\_\_bb*) from adjectives and adverbs that normally do not have them, or even from nouns (again, a Finno-Ugric trait).<sup>42</sup>

Examples: *Venus vulgivagának a legfék|telenebb papja* “the most unbridled priest of streetwalker (*vulgivaga*) Venus” (*Életeim* 1.512), *a legutána|tánc|ol|ó|bb szolgája* “his most dancing-after-him (*read*: obsequious) servant” (*AEF* 2.131). In these two examples we see adjectival gradation coupled with a privative and a participle, respectively (we return to privatives immediately below). In the following example the comparative is combined with both etymological figure and the translative case: *ökl-é-t ökl=öb-bé szorította* “he squeezed his fist tighter (‘into becoming fister’)” (*CsÉ* 1.144). Note also *a gyermek=ebb=ik lelkem* “the more child of my (two) souls” (*Életeim* 1.342) and, again with the translative, *mindig Szabó Dezső=b=bé készítettek* “they made me more and more Dezső Szabó” (*Életeim* 2.314)

If superlatives express one kind of extreme (*bravest*), **privatives** express their opposite (*without bravery*). This does not preclude their joint occurrence (*the most without bravery*), and Szabó is fond of the Hungarian privative ( $=t^{a/e}n$ ,  $=t^{a/e}l^{a/e}n$ ,  $=^{a/e}tl^{a/e}n$ )<sup>43</sup> in both gradated and non-gradated forms, and combined with other favoured grammatical and lexical features, for example *múlhatlanul élővé* ‘(becoming) unperishably living’ (with translative *-vé*; *Életeim* 1.519), *kevés embert lehetett igaztalanabbul vádolni felületességgel, mint engemet* ‘few people could be accused of superficiality more unjustly than I’ (with comparative  $=bb$ ; *Életeim* 2.114).<sup>44</sup>

One last sample sentence; in it we see one way Szabó was able to work with a verb derived with the privative suffix. The simple, synchronically denominal verb *gyámol-* ‘support, help’ forms the privative adjective *gyámol=talan* ‘helpless, without support’ quite regularly; from this adjective a stative verb can be formed by means of the derivational suffix =*k<sup>o/ö/e</sup>d-*, giving *gyámoltalan=kod-ik* ‘is/feels helpless, is without support’. So much is normal and relatively unremarkable as Hungarian lexicogrammar. But Szabó goes a few steps further. Adding the verbal particle *fel|* introduces the notion of incipient state, and reduplicating this particle (*fel&fel|*) renders the incipient state repetitive: we now have *fel-felgyámoltalankodik*, roughly ‘is repeatedly (observed to be) in a helpless state’. Finally, the gerund suffix *-v<sup>a/e</sup>* deranks the verb, signalling that the sequence of the first nine words form an adverbial clause: (*A falu körül*), *fel-fel|gyámol=talan=kod=va* (*a beteg, sárgás dombok<sup>r</sup> oldalai<sup>d</sup>ra*), (*aszott, kétségbeesett, erőtetett szántóföldek*) *nyúlnak* ‘Around the village, cropping up helplessly here and there on the sickly, yellowish hillsides there stretched dried-up, desperate, forced ploughland’ – note, in passing, the string of three participial premodifiers in the sentence-final subject noun phrase.

We now turn to Szabó’s use of **complex noun phrases**, of which it will be useful to distinguish three kinds. At the level of the noun phrase,<sup>45</sup> Szabó’s most characteristic trait is a kind of premodifying participial construction, usually considered functionally ‘equivalent’ to a subordinate clause in the linguistic literature.<sup>46</sup> As we shall see below, Szabó also makes use of two further constructions that can render noun phrases more complex: complex adjectives (as in English *blue-eyed*, but with far wider application) and possessive constructions (as in *Harriet’s pony*, but with a significantly different structure).

Here we must make a brief digression into my understanding of the noun phrase (hereafter: NP). For the purposes of this essay I take it as given that NPs in all languages are the predominant unbound formal expression – insofar as they occur at all – of the arguments and adjuncts of clauses.<sup>47</sup> The head of a Hungarian NP is usually a noun, but it may also be an adjective, numeral, or pronoun – or any other part of speech ‘used as a noun’, as in *állj meg* ‘(the order) “Halt!”’. Unlike the order of clauses in a sentence, or the order of constituents in a clause, the order of elements in a Hungarian NP is relatively fixed. Postmodification of the head is usually expressed by an overt relative clause, introduced by a relative pronoun, as in *mi Atyánk, {aki a mennyekben vagy}*<sup>48</sup> ‘our Father, who art in heaven’, or, much more rarely, by an appositive phrase, as in *festő a falu-n* ‘(a) painter in the countryside’. Premodification may be by determiners, quantifiers, counters, adjectives (or nouns functioning as adjectives), and participles; these last may be accompanied by any adjuncts their verbs lexically select.<sup>49</sup> The point is that while front-heavy modifiers can be and are constructed in written Hungarian, the technique has been relatively uncommon in literary prose since the turn of the last century,<sup>50</sup> whereas such constructions are not only characteristic of, they are the norm in Hungarian academic, juristic, and journalistic prose.

Szabó’s frequent use of such constructions is the single most salient feature of his style.

That Szabó favours NP-internal participial constructions (and other complex premodifiers) is consistent with his preference for parataxis. The connexion between

parataxis and packed NPs is an indirect one, but has statistical importance, simply because those kinds of Hungarian discourse that are low in, or even totally lacking, subordinate clauses are often commensurately high in parataxis and NPs, many of which will be ‘packed’, that is, provided with modifiers that are multiple, complex, or both. One example should make this clear. In an article entitled ‘Mellérendelés és fordítás’ (Parataxis and Translation) József Végvári (Debrecen University, Idegennyelvi Központ<sup>51</sup>) has argued that the perfectly normal English sentence *I am pleased to have the honour to ask Mr Chomsky to deliver his lecture*, which has three ‘levels’ of ‘nested’<sup>52</sup> subordinate (= hypotactic clauses): *I am pleased [to have the honour [to ask Mr Chomsky [to deliver his lecture]]]* is not well translated into Hungarian by a sentence with similar syntactic structure: *Örülök, [hogyan abban a megtiszteltetésben lehet részem, [hogyan fölkérhetem Chomsky urat arra, [hogyan tartsa meg előadását]]]*. He claims, correctly, that it is normally seen as more Hungarian to use, instead, a sentence that contains no ‘nesting’ but which rather consists of a single, simple copula clause, with its copula subject (subscript CS) standing in for ‘that I can ask Mr Chomsky onto the holding of his lecture’ and its copula complement (subscript CC) standing in for ‘a pleasure and honour’: (Öröm és megtiszteltetés)<sub>cc</sub> számomra, [hogyan fölkérhetem (Chomsky urat) (előadásá<sup>d</sup>nak<sup>r</sup> megtartásá<sup>d</sup>ra)]<sub>cs</sub>. A closer, foreignizing English paraphrase of this Hungarian clause would be “That I can ask Mr Chomsky onto the holding of his lecture is a joy and an honour”. The copula, or ‘equivalent’ of English *is* here is, in Hungarian, zero.

We turn now to Szabó’s **NP-internal participial constructions**. Midway in his autobiography Szabó sums up his entire life as *homokba öntött bor* “wine (which has been) poured into (the) sand” (*Életem* 1.610). This grammatically simple example

will also serve to illustrate some of Szabó's perversity with metaphor and his ironic conception of self. For some readers, the phrase will invoke the parable of the sower (seed on stony ground), as at Matthew 13:3ff, but Szabó twists the metaphor in such a way that his life is likened not to a seed, from which, if properly planted, a new life can begin, but to wine, the end product of cultivation, which if poured on sand is uselessly lost or at least unwillingly helpless.

In the examples to follow, NP-internal participles (and any adjuncts, where relevant) are underscored: (a faluba züllött kokott lázadó merészségé<sup>d</sup>vel) *kínálgatta bájait* “she went around offering her charms with the rebellious audacity of a *cocotte* who has fallen/decayed back into the village” (*AEF* 1.95). Here we have two participles, perfective *züllött* ‘fallen, depraved’—but here to be construed as a verb of motion, because of its adjunct *faluba* ‘into the village’—and the imperfective participle *lázadó* ‘rebellious’, attributive to *merészség* ‘audacity’. In this one clause one also glimpses aspects of Szabó's attitude to the countryside, decadence, and women; note, too, the register shift in the foreignism *kokott*. Besides the participial construction of *mint egy hirtelen kidugott butélia nehéz borá<sup>d</sup>nak az illata<sup>d</sup>* “like the fragrance of the heavy wine of a bottle that has been suddenly uncorked” (*Életeim* 1.496), there are both foreignism (*butélia* for standard *üveg* ‘bottle’) and the neologizing, wilfully idiosyncratic, verb morphology (*ki|dug=ott* for normal *ki|dug=asz=ol=t* ‘uncorked’; *ki|dug-* is normally used to refer to the protrusion of body parts, as in *kidugta a fejét az ablakon* “he stuck his head out the window”). In *padratettkezű<sup>53</sup> impotensek szorgalmas csapata<sup>d</sup>* “the assiduous troop of impotents with their hands placed on the school-bench” (*AEF* 2.233), one notes also the complex, *bahuvrihi* adjective in *=ű* and the foreignism *impotens* with dual senses ‘incapable’ and ‘sexually unable’.

Szabó's use of participial modifiers is so extensive as to border on what students of Greek rhetoric used to call *pyknometochia*.<sup>54</sup> As examples throughout this essay show, sometimes the surfeit of participial modification is achieved by a heavy use of accompanying adjuncts, but often it is due simply to a large number of adjunct-free participles occurring in thick and rapid succession, for example *Neki (minden atomja) (felfakadt száj) volt, hogy érezze, hogy ő (a megkondított harang), (a felrázott ököl), (az odadörgött állj meg)* "His every atom was a mouth burst open, so that he might feel that he was the bell rung, the fist raised in anger, the 'Halt!' roared thither" (*AEF* 1.172; recall the reference to the use of non-noun forms as nouns mentioned above), or *ijedt pacalista, rémült gimnazista, döbbent tanító, megszeppent privát tanító, aggódó tanárcok* "scared schoolboys, terrified students, startled teachers, distraught private tutors, anxious professor faces" (*Életeim* 1.160; *pacalista* is a highly unusual lexical item in its own right).

As mentioned above, besides participles and their adjuncts and complex adjectives like *padratettkezű* 'with hands placed on bench' there is another source of complexity in Hungarian NPs, namely that of **possession**. One way to think of the expression of possession in the Hungarian NP is that it is effectively two NPs joined; but the joining is effected not by a genitive (marking the possessor, as in most European languages), but by a pensive<sup>55</sup> suffix (marking the possessed). This kind of NP-'internal' complexity is not the whole story, however. Further layers of complexity may be superimposed, in that (1.) the joined, possessive NP may be discontinuous, and (2.) the more common order, possessor-possessed, as in *Jakab' macská-ja<sup>d</sup>* or *Jakab(-nak' a) macská-ja<sup>d</sup>* 'Jacob's cat', may be reversed (to possessed-possessor) if pragmatic,

that is, information-structure factors (such as topicalization or focalization) supervene, as in <Jakab-nak<sup>r</sup>> meghalt <a macská-ja<sup>d</sup>> roughly ‘As for Jacob, his cat died’ or <A macská-ja<sup>d</sup>> halt meg <Jakab-nak<sup>d</sup>>, roughly ‘It was Jacob’s cat that died (not his rabbit)’.<sup>56</sup> What is more, NPs may contain double or triple (recursive) possessive constructions, as in (lelki élete<sup>r</sup> mechanizmusá<sup>d</sup>nak<sup>r</sup> kényszeré<sup>d</sup>ből) ‘out of the necessity of the mechanism of his spiritual life’ (*Életeim* 2.254); the flexibilities offered by such constructions cannot be gone into here.

Here I do no more than provide a short sample list of sample packed NPs from *AEF*, *CsÉ*, and *Életeim*. In the table below, columns A and B list the linguistic exhibits and their location, respectively; the remaining six columns itemize packing devices:

C = participial (deranked) relative clauses, **dR**; D = other complex premodifiers (bahuvrihi adjectives, **B**); E = possessive constructions, **P**; as a subtype of possessive construction, complexity is tracked in columns F and G as **I**(nverse) and **D**(iscontinuous); finally, in column H, notable lexis (that is, vocabulary that is either stylistically odd or textually rare, or particularly favoured by Szabó, such as *magyar*, *lélek*, *élet*, discussed above, or even *örök* ‘eternal’) is signalled by **L**, vagueness (most commonly signalled by the indefinite *valami* ‘some kind of’) by **V**, superlative by **S**, comparative by **C**, privative by **N**, translative by **T**, and etymological figure by **F**:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
( <u>hajtott</u> léptek <sup>r</sup> zaja <sup>d</sup> ) hallszott	AEF 2.76	dR		P			
(négy borzadalmas <u>elgurultja</u> <sup>d</sup> az olcsó szerelemnek <sup>r</sup> )	AEF 2.77	dR		P	I		
(olyan <u>meghatott</u> , <u>mély ölelkezésű</u> , <u>életem</u> <sup>r</sup> minden <u>húrjá</u> <sup>d</sup> n rezdülő találkozásom)	É. 2.315	dR	B	P			
( <u>szaggatott</u> , <u>ijedten siető</u> beszédében)	É. 2.193	dR					
( <u>hadvész ülte</u> képpel)	É. 2.328	dR					

(a filozopteri retorika <sup>r</sup> híg mosléká <sup>d</sup> ban)	É. 2.329			P			L
(a jövő nemzedék <sup>r</sup> nevelésé <sup>d</sup> vel megbízott tanár)	É. 2.331	dR		P			
(mélyen ülő szemeiben)	É. 2.332	dR					
(valami hamis fény)	É. 2.332						V
(életem <sup>r</sup> e messze hangzó jelenségei <sup>d</sup> )	É. 2.336	dR		P			
(a szellemi életet élő ifjúságban)	É. 2.339	dR					F
(egy abszolúte önmagába koncentrált élet)	É. 2.349	dR					L
(lelki élete <sup>r</sup> mechanizmusá <sup>d</sup> nak <sup>r</sup> kényszeré <sup>d</sup> ből)	É. 2.254			P,P			
(egy végtére elemezhetetlen bonyolult lelki alkatú egyéni lélek)	É. 2.356		B				N
(édes fürtű kacagással)	É. 1.158		B				L
(homlokára hulló fürtökkel)	AEF 1.158	dR					
(felszökésében megdermedt roppant ima)	É. 1.164	dR					
(a fiatal hit <sup>r</sup> e tavaszi vihara <sup>d</sup> )	É. 1.164			P			
(a négyszáz lélekből szótt ének)	É. 1.164	dR					
<mélyé <sup>d</sup> > olvassa <egy nehéz könyvnek <sup>r</sup> >	CsÉ. 1.171			P	I	D	
nem <a legkisebb pocakja> volt <a tekintélyemnek>	É. 1.160			P	I	D	S, L
(egy láthatatlan madár <sup>r</sup> mérhetetlen árnyéka <sup>d</sup> )	CsÉ. 1.91			P			N
(legszebb álmai <sup>d</sup> a tragikus életnek <sup>r</sup> )	CsÉ. 2.53			P	I		S
(öt szép leánya <sup>d</sup> az öreg Időnek <sup>r</sup> )	CsÉ. 1.222			P	I		
(a hosszú, jól fésült hajú, Krisztus szakállú, nagy, kérdőszemű paraszt)	AEF 1.216	dR	B				
<Miklósnak <sup>r</sup> > élővé villant <az arca <sup>d</sup> >	AEF 1.227			P		D	T
(lelki bazára <sup>d</sup> a változó napoknak <sup>r</sup> )	AEF 1.228	dR		P	I		
(a szerteszét rögtönzött legkülönbözőbb alakú pótasztalok között)	AEF 1.236	dR	B				S
(egy Csehországból szakadt lakáj igazgató <sup>r</sup> gonoszsága <sup>d</sup> alatt)	AEF 1.249	dR		P			L
(valami vallássá rajongott hálát)	AEF 1.249	dR					T, V
(múló dalai <sup>d</sup> a halhatatlan szépségnek <sup>r</sup> ), (kitárt karjai <sup>d</sup> az örök vágynak <sup>r</sup> )	AEF 1.251	dR		P	I		L (örök)
(káprázottjai <sup>d</sup> az örök világosságnak <sup>r</sup> )	AEF 1.216			P	I		L (örök)

We turn now to Szabó's **similes**.<sup>57</sup> These are often striking, and for a number of interlocking reasons. First, the standard of comparison, or the comparandum,<sup>58</sup> or both are often odd or outright *recherché*. Second, the oddness of the items compared results in a strange fit, one which is made more bizarre by means of packed noun phrases whose complex modifiers introduce further incongruities. Third, the standard of comparison can be less or more concrete than the comparandum;<sup>59</sup> that is, the strangeness of fit often resides in the (mis)match of abstract and concrete. Fourth, the simile is often anticipated, — as it were, pre-empted — by metaphor. Fifth and finally, Szabó's similes are not only varied: they are legion. As an example, consider chapter 1.3 (pages 1.28-43) of *AEF*, in which the vicar's head is heavy "like a plummeting churchbell" (1.28), speech is "like a bite of raw meat to a hungry tiger" (1.30), the spoiled child speaks "like someone who doesn't really know what he's saying" (1.30), the vicar "leaps out of bed like a child" (1.31), a little lamp's "breath and light" oppresses the dreams of a row of sleeping children "like a weighty succubus" (1.32), a woman's purity, beauty, self-sacrifice and suffering "shout, like a sudden reminder" (1.33), the vicar's wife throws herself into reading "as if into a great river of infinite rest that flowed on and on" (1.33), Jenő fantasizes of love and of leaping, rejoicing, onto the execution-ground "like Szilveszter, the Apostle (the protagonist of one of Petőfi's darkest poems)" (1.36), peasants' hovels stand opposite a ruined palace "like an accusation of ancient purity" (1.36), debts pour onto a household "like rolling boulders" (1.37), a father's features grow ever sharper in his son's face "like a revenant in the window of an empty house" (1.39), family "spreads like a body's warmth from a just-left bed" (1.40), the vicar avoids his study "like he

avoids his conscience” (1.41), “some kind of voluntary submission before the royalty of her (Judit’s) beauty” is like “a natural law of the highest order that silences all petty jealousies” (1.41), János Bőjthe’s voice is sometimes “like an approaching hurricane” (1.42), and a meal is “like a great shared soul” that “warms the diners into a “shared family of one flesh” (1.42). Or, on a more compact scale, consider the four similes in seventy-two words of *CsÉ*. 1.183: Pista, the hero, eats “like a young wolf”; powers arise in his body “like rested giants”; his muscles rear up “like young dogs”; and the past rushes away “like a smashed pirate ship”.

As will be clear even from these translated excerpts, Szabó’s similes are commonly admixed with metaphor. This is not surprising in itself, but the nature of the similes and metaphors, and the ways in which Szabó combines them, merit a closer look<sup>60</sup>:

CHURCH LIKE AN ELEPHANT	2	“next to the church, which stood above the tiny gravestones of the churchyard <b>like a worn-out old elephant that had lost its hair</b> ” a templom mellett, mely úgy állott a cinterem apró fejfás sírhalmi között, <b>mint egy szőrehullatott öreg, kopott elefánt</b> ( <i>AEF</i> 1.25)
MEAL LIKE A SOUL	3	“The meal, <b>like a great shared soul</b> , warmed them into a <u>shared family of one flesh</u> ” Az ebéd, <b>mint egy nagy közös lélek, közös, egyhúsú</b> családdá melegítette őket (1.42).
VOICE LIKE SMOKE	2	“Milla’s soft voice <u>spread languidly</u> , <b>like a weary smoke of pleasant fragrance</b> ” A Milla lány hangja <u>lanyhán terjedt, mint egy kellemes illatú fáradt füst</u> . (1.47)
PEACE LIKE A CAT	3	“And in János’s body, <b>like a big white cat</b> , <u>warm productive peace stretched out to full length</u> ” És János testében, <b>mint egy nagy fehér macska</b> , <u>meleg, termékeny béke nyúlt végig</u> . (1.51)
WORDS LIKE SOLDIERS	4	<u>Weeping, naked, trembling words shoved each other out of him in disorderly order</u> , <b>like the routed soldiers of a great defeat</b> <u>Síró, meztelen, reszkető</u> szavak <u>tuszkolták egymást ki belőle rendetlen rendben</u> , <b>mint egy nagy vereség futó katonái</b> . (1.59)
SILENCE LIKE OLD WOMAN	3	“You see, the silence <u>stands</u> in this giant cathedral <b>like a kind old woman who could be the mother of anyone who is ill</b> ” Látod, a csend úgy <u>áll</u> ebben az óriási katedrálisban, <b>mint egy nagyon jó öregasszony, aki</b>

		<b>minden betegnek anyja lehet. (1.65)</b>
HUNGARIAN LIKE DOG	2	“The Hungarian, with deep-buried treasures, sulking, shuffles to the side, <b>like a dog that’s been smacked on the snout</b> ” A magyar a mélyére süllyesztett kincsekkel duzzogva kullog félre, <b>mint egy orron ütött kutya. (1.66;</b> part of a protracted portrayal of Hungarians as “the biggest losers in world history”; the contrast is with “Germans, Slavs, and Jews”)
CANDLE LIKE A GIRL	3	“the candle <u>cocked its head to one side</u> , <b>like a little girl listening</b> ” a gyertya <u>félrehajította fejét</u> , <b>mint egy figyelő gyermeklány (2.24)</b>
HEART LIKE A BELL	2 3 4	“He stayed up all night, he drank so much black coffee his <u>loosened</u> heart <u>boomed</u> <b>like a churchbell hanging down</b> ” Éjszakázott, annyi feketét ivott, hogy <u>meglazult</u> szíve <u>kongott</u> , <b>mint a lelógó harang (2.44)</b>

In the following sentence we have the extension of the rather precious metaphors FEAR CASTS SHADOWS and SHADOWS ARE BREATH into a simile in which darkness, mystery and personified death seem to reside and hide in nature and in man, making us afraid as we walk by: *Csak két élőlény volt az Éva közelében, kik árnyékot leheltek néha a lelkére, **mint mikor a halál megbújik ellenünk kőben, fában, emberben és mi megborzadunk, ha elmegyünk mellettük*** “There were only two living beings in Éva’s entourage that sometimes breathed a shadow on his (Pista’s) soul, as when death hides from us in stone or tree or person and we shudder when we walk past them” (CsÉ. 1.226).

Szabó is also fond of double similes, and of similes within similes. Here we have room for only one of each:

HOUSES LIKE GRAVESTONES, LIKE FACES	2 3 4	A falu házai sápadtak voltak a rájuk néző holdban, <b>mint apró sírkövek, mint fennvirrasztó arcok. (AEF 2.50)</b> “The houses of the village were pale in the on-them-looking moonlight, <b>like tiny gravestones, like staying-up-all-night faces</b> ”
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We have simile within a simile in *Égető kihajlással látszott minden, mintha az egész kétségbeesett falu, mint egymásba torlott vert hadsereg, ijedt futással be akart volna menekülni ebbe az erős emberbe*, hogy életet akarjon, mégis életet, diadalmasan, lebírhatatlanul, where it is “as if” the village wanted to escape, “like” defeated armies colliding (*AEF* 1.27)

As with similes, packed NPs play an important role in Szabó’s **metaphors**, which are frequently presented by means of copula clauses.<sup>61</sup> They are therefore more like bald assertions than subtle suggestions; and the onus falls, once again, on NPs to do the rhetorical or logical heavy lifting.

Here is a simple example, said of a piano: (*A fehér billentyűk (megtárt kebel’ forró fényessége<sup>d</sup>) volt (AEF* 2.75) ‘the white keys were the hot brightness of a bared bosom’. A few sentences later we have finite verb forms added into the mix: (*a zongora) jajgatott, kért, megadta magát, fuldoklott, és (a végső viharos akkordok) (a feltámadt férfi’ utolsó győzedelmes kicsattanása<sup>d</sup>) volt* ‘the piano groaned, begged, surrendered, choked, and the final stormy chords were the triumphant bursting forth of the resurrected man’. This is not to say, however, that Szabó avoids metaphor in sentences built with verbs with more semantic content. We have for example birches that gossip away the spring’s secrets (*a nyírfák pletykálták a tavasz titkait, CsÉ.* 1.131), a river whose flow brings with it “the feverish message of urgent spring”: *A folyó [...] hozta magával (lázás izeneté<sup>d</sup>t a sürgető tavasznak’), CsÉ.* 1.205, and the soul as a building whose tenants are weeping and laughter, which “lived so close together that they sometimes came out, arm in arm, to sit in the window of her eyes”: *Mert a Zsuzsa jó lelkének csak két lakója volt: a sírás és a nevetés és ezek*

*olyan szoros szomszédságban voltak, hogy néha karonfogva ültek ki a szemé  
ablakába, CsÉ 1.196.*

As noted earlier, Szabó frequently combines his metaphors with similes, as in *Az erdő fel-felbőgött, mint az eltalált bika* (CsÉ 1.167) ‘The forest roared repeatedly, like a felled bull’. Here again, the simile has its participial premodifier, but the source domain (large animal) is telegraphed in the metaphor of the preceding clause.<sup>62</sup>

Two further examples, both from *Csodálatos élet: Mind kevesebb lett a szava s néha olyan orrvérzősen szedte a Zsuzsa örökké termő csókfájáról a csókokat, mintha halálos ítéletéért nyúlna* (CsÉ 1.202) “He spoke less and less and sometimes he picked the kisses from Zsuzsa’s ever-productive kiss-tree so nose-bleedingly that it was as if he were reaching for his death sentence”; the simile is predicted by the metaphor of kiss-harvesting in the preceding, subordinate clause. One page later we find a parallel pairing of metaphor and simile: *Most már nem hallott, nem látott, nem beszélt, minden krajcárját könyvekért adta, úgy falta a betűket, mint más tisztességes ember a töltöttkáposztát* (1.103) “He no longer heard, or saw, or spoke, he spent his every krajcár on books, he devoured letters the way other, respectable people eat stuffed cabbage”. Although eating is foreshadowed in the ‘devoured’ metaphor, the simile adds verve by specifying cabbage.

One further example. In this case we have a double simile, and it perhaps overpowers the metaphor, which entails both TEACHING IS CASTING LIGHT and UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING:

És ezek, akiknek  
**mint kilobogó fáklyáknak**  
kellett volna világítaniok a vak gyermek elé,

vakon néztek az ismeretlen nép felé,  
**mint ahogy eltaposott fáklyák fekete füstje száll a fekete éjszakába.** (AEF 1.193)

‘And these, who should have lit the path before blind children **like blazing torches**, gazed blindly instead toward the unknown Volk,  
**the way the black smoke of torches that have been stamped out soars into the black night.**’

In effect, the arrogant city-dwellers (Sarkadi and his pals, who have been paying an ignorant visit to the countryside) are likened not to the enlightening torches they should metaphorically have been, but rather to the smouldering sooty smoke of torches that have been extinguished.

We conclude our look at Szabó’s metaphors and similes with one more complex example, in which we find three similes intertwined with five packed NPs:

(Elnyúlt orral), **mint (egy szélben álló vizsla)**,  
(hat felé figyelő szemmel), **mint (egy féltékeny asszony)**,  
(tizenkét felé tisztelettel igenlő nyakkal), **mint (egy miniszteri titkár)**,  
lehetőleg látszóan, ordító szerényen, **de (boglyasodó önérzettel)**,  
csücsült (Gruber Ede) (egy karszékben). (AEF 2.147)

‘With outstretched nose, like a bloodhound standing in the wind,  
with eyes straining in six directions, like a jealous woman,  
with a neck respectfully nodding “yes” in twelve directions,  
like a minister’s secretary, as conspicuously as possible,  
with clamorous modesty, yet with a tousled self-respect,  
Ede Gruber sat in an armchair.’

Other **schemes larger than the clause** take up much space, so we have room here to look at only a very few. It is important to note in this connexion that although

Hungarian has multiple options not only for the construction of NPs but also for the linking of both complement and adverbial clauses, neither of these latter two kinds of construction offered variables which Szabó was eager to exploit. In the case of complement clauses the reasons for his abstention are clear: for although—parallel to the balanced and deranked constructions of Hungarian RCs—we do have balanced and deranked<sup>63</sup> complement clauses in Hungarian (*Láttam, hogy jött* and *Láttam jöttét*, both ‘I saw that he (had) come’), the latter construction is extremely rare and lexically restricted. Hungarian adverbial clauses, too, have both balanced and deranked versions, the latter formed with a suffix that simultaneously marks the verb as occupying the predicate slot of a subordinate clause and stripping the verb of subject and object marking, for example *üvöltve üdvözölték* shriek-GER greet-PT-3PLURA.3DEF0 ‘they greeted it shrieking’ (*AEF* 1.77). But Szabó does not work the gerund anywhere near so hard as he works the noun phrase.

What is most important to note about larger schemes in connexion with Szabó’s style is that they almost always entail repetition and parallelism—a kind of partial repetition—and they often take on a triadic or tetradic shape. What is more, such triadic or tetradic parallel constructions also quite often involve rhopalism, a reflection of Behaghel’s *Gesetz der wachsenden Glieder*, which states that *ceteris paribus* shorter sentence components precede longer ones.<sup>64</sup> There is a parallel tendency in *Kalevala* metre, the so-called *viskurilaki* “winnowing principle”, of which Szabó was at least subliminally aware.<sup>65</sup>

For example, the first paragraph of *Az elsodort falu* has a double-triadic structure. It consists of six sentences, three declaratives dovetailing with three negations; the

syllable-counts are 10/3, 6/3, 9/3, that is, a diminuendo-crescendo 10-6-9 of declaratives against an ostinato 3-3-3 of negations. In the next paragraph, three consecutive sentences relate the state of affairs the day before yesterday, yesterday, and today, with parallelism and repetition: *tegnapelőtt már [...] tegnap már [...] ma már [...]* and with syllable counts of 10, 30, and 30. Further examples (syllable-count superscripts signal rhopalism): <sup>3</sup>*nyerítő*, <sup>3</sup>*tajtékos*, <sup>6</sup>*lobogósörényű hullámlovak* “neighing, foaming, fluttering-maned wave-horses” (*CsÉ* 2.131); the tetradic <sup>3</sup>*politika*, <sup>2</sup>*pezsgő*, <sup>2</sup>*kártya*, <sup>5</sup>*drága fehérnép* “politics, champagne, cards, expensive women” (*AEF* 113); similarly, in dialogue: <sup>8</sup>*Nem ember az te, hanem sváb. [...] <sup>6</sup>Nem is sváb, hanem tót. <sup>12</sup>Tót fenét, zsidó az, olyan zsidó, hogy na. <sup>12</sup>Oláh is lehet, ha már arról beszélünk* “That’s no person, that’s a German. No, he isn’t a German, he’s a Slovak. Slovak, hell—he’s a Jew, such a Jew that - so there! He might even be a Romanian, when you come right down to it” (*CsÉ* 2.248; the Hungarian ethnonyms *sváb*, *tót* and *oláh* are all politically incorrect).

Szabó is unafraid of repetition in its baldest – what we might call the purely quantitative – form. For example, he uses the root *kacag-* ‘laugh’ six times in the space of sixty-three words (*CsÉ*. 2.49). On twenty-five pages taken at random from *CsÉ*, we find thirty instances of twofold or threefold adjacent reiterations such as *király vagyok, király vagyok* ‘I’m king, I’m king’ (2.111), *nincs szívem, nincs szívem* ‘I have no heart, ‘I have no heart’ (2.76), *életet, életet* ‘Life! Life!’ (2.161), or *győztem, győztem* ‘I won, I won’ (2.101, but also on at least three other pages).

An analysis of the number and nature of verb forms in Szabó’s prose promises to yield suggestive results.<sup>66</sup> In terms of the relative frequency, or proportion, of verb

forms as opposed to all others (nouns, non-participial adjectives, articles, adverbs, *etc.*), there are two gross kinds of pattern: in some passages, something over a fifth of the words are verb forms (samples B and D, with 23% and 21%) whereas in others the proportion is closer to 15% (samples A, E, F, and C). On the other hand in terms of the relative frequency of non-finite forms three gross kinds of pattern occur. We have passages in which non-finite forms constitute over half of all verb forms, ranging from 53% (sample B) though 67% (sample E) to 100% (sample A). Samples C and D contrast with a more moderate pattern, with 33% and 32% of their verb forms being non-finite. At the far other end of the scale we have the pattern of Sample F, in which only 9% of the verb forms are non-finite.

No claim is made here for some kind of iconic connexion between the deployment of verb forms, whether finite or otherwise, and the stuff of narration. Rather, what I believe these figures illustrate is the fact that Szabó availed himself of an unusually wide range of lexicogrammatical means, with a decisive effect on the style of his prose. The shifts in frequency of finite and non-finite verb forms on the one hand, and of verbs as a whole vis-à-vis other parts of speech on the other, function in a manner analogous to shifts in key and tempo in movements of music: that is, these shifts in texture function not iconically but rather indexically<sup>67</sup>:

passage	total wds	of which verbs	%	of which non-finite	%
A	80	13	16%	13	100%
E	97	15	16%	10	67%
B	66	15	23%	8	53%
C	201	28	14%	7	33%
D	193	41	21%	13	32%
F	216	35	16%	3	9%

A closer look at a longer passage will illustrate how Szabó can sustain intricate repetitive patterns by means no more complex than the iteration of particular words, stems, suffixes or grammatical constructions. Our extract is from *Csodálatos élet* (2.135). In the space of 79 words, we have nine sets of repeated lexical material (given in bold, with superscripts to aid in matching with the English paraphrase). The repeated material is semantically of importance, in fact it is all key to Szabó's ultimate programme in this novel, namely the insemination, by Sekler males, of comely Sekler wenches<sup>68</sup>. We have repeated <sup>1</sup>'Sekler', <sup>2</sup>'sow (seed)', <sup>3</sup>'split', <sup>4</sup>'earth', <sup>5</sup>'furrow', <sup>6</sup>'woman' (three times), <sup>7</sup>'turn (head, here: to lock on the male gaze or, in the case of the woman, coyly to avoid eye contact)', <sup>8</sup>'merry' and <sup>9</sup>'goodness/goodly'. Reference tracking, which in Hungarian is assisted with the gender-neutral, [+]<sub>HUMAN</sub> third-person pronoun *ő* and the distal demonstrative *az*, is here divided according to sex: the male protagonist is encoded with *ő*, the female with *az* (forms underscored in both texts):

Álmában megint egyszerű <sup>1</sup>**székely** falusi legény volt. Az otthoni határban <sup>2</sup>**vetettek**. Ő ekével <sup>3</sup>**hasította** a <sup>4</sup>**földet**. A szép fekete <sup>4</sup>**föld** csak úgy borult kétfelé a fel<sup>3</sup>**hasadó** <sup>5</sup>**barázdából**. Utána egy fiatal <sup>6</sup>**nő** jött s kötényéből búzaszemet <sup>2</sup>**vetett** a <sup>5</sup>**barázdába**. Ő <sup>7</sup>**vidám** <sup>1</sup>**székely** nótát füttyült, a <sup>6</sup>**nő** halkán dúdolt hozzá. Nagy <sup>7</sup>**vigassága** volt a mezőnek s <sup>8</sup>**jóság** volt a világ arcán. Ő mindegyre hátra<sup>9</sup>**fordult**, hogy megtudja, ki az a <sup>6</sup>**nő**, de az mindig el<sup>9</sup>**fordította** a fejét. Csak <sup>8</sup>**jóságosan** mosolygó száját láthatta.

“In his dream once more he was a simple <sup>1</sup>**Sekler** village lad. The <sup>2</sup>**sowing** had begun. He was <sup>3</sup>**splitting** the <sup>4</sup>**earth** with the plough. The beautiful black <sup>4</sup>**earth** was pouring to either side as the <sup>5</sup>**furrow** was <sup>3</sup>**split**. Behind him a young <sup>6</sup>**woman** was walking,

<sup>2</sup>sowing wheat into the <sup>5</sup>furrow from her apron. He was whistling a <sup>7</sup>merry <sup>1</sup>Sekler tune, the <sup>6</sup>woman softly hummed along with him. There was great <sup>7</sup>merriness in the field and <sup>8</sup>goodness on the face of the earth. Again and again he <sup>9</sup>turned around to see who the <sup>6</sup>woman was, but she kept <sup>9</sup>turning her head away. All he could see was her <sup>8</sup>goodly smiling mouth.”

If this were rhymed verse, we might speak of a rhyme scheme:

‘Sekler’	A-----A
‘sow (seed)’	B-----B
‘split’	C—C
‘earth’	DD
‘furrow’	E—E
‘woman’	F-----F---F
‘merry’	G---G
‘good’	H---H
‘turn’	I—I

The parallel with melodic design requires no comment.

[[[

We may now summarize. First, in Dezső Szabó’s style parataxis, usually asyndetic, dominates over hypotaxis, allowing for the comment-free juxtaposition of predicates and their arguments and adjuncts—and thus also the unexplicated *Nacheinander* of associations of ideas.<sup>69</sup> The links in the chain of Szabó’s thinking proceed with a starkness reminiscent of Icelandic saga narrative.<sup>70</sup> Second, and in sharp contrast to this parataxis, his style is also characterized by a high level of compression, achieved not, as often, by hypotaxis but by polysynthetic formations (such as compound adjectives), complex participial constructions, and frequent register shifts. All these

traits lend an aura of mystery to his prose: the fascinating<sup>71</sup> complexity of the lexis and syntax seems to envelop more than is actually there. One of his favourite tropes is *significatio*: as we have seen across a wide range of examples, Szabó prefers assertion to argumentation, and seeks to state by implication. Connected with this tendency is his heavy reliance on copula clauses (which present bland assertions of a pseudo-syllogistic kind) and on packed NPs, which smuggle in, in a compressed, insidious way, all too much in the way of unjustified adjectival baggage. Third, his frequent use of parallel triadic and tetradic structures reinforces this density while giving the impression of verbosity, not of a flabby kind but rather of the exuberant, extravagant effusion of which D'Annunzio (in *Il piacere*) or Giraudoux (in *Simon le pathétique*) was capable.<sup>72</sup> His style is thus perplexing, but it might also be termed auxetic: like certain strange counter-intuitive substances, the more his sentences stretch, the bulkier and denser they seem to become.

Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1965) attempted to give wing to the pedestrian dualism of 'form' versus 'content' when he postulated two planes, one of expression and one of content (corresponding to Saussure's *signifiant* and *signifié*), and proposed that both substance and form operate on these two planes. For example, the 'raw' physical materials and processes of the medium (sound waves of music and the voice, paints, printed characters) are substance operating on the plane of expression ('the substance of expression'). Or: the 'semantic structure' (of a film, say, or of a symphony) is form operating on the plane of content ('the form of content').<sup>73</sup> What I have tried to suggest in this essay is that the force of Dezső Szabó's personality, and thereby the breadth and depth of his influence in the dozen or so years after the First World War,

derived at least as much from the form of both his expression and content as it did from any substance.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bryan Cartledge, *The Will to Survive. A History of Hungary*, London, 2006, p. 354.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this essay I work with the assumption that the complex of interconnected features which went to make up the personality of Dezső Szabó can never be truly known, much less revealed, as if it were the answer to a riddle. While many of my text exemplars will hint at features such as 'self-esteem', they are not cited in order to demonstrate it. whence the use of the word *approaching* in my title.

<sup>3</sup>'Szabó Dezső', in *A magyar irodalom arcképcsarnoka* (Picture Gallery of Hungarian Literature) available July 4, 2006 at <http://mek.oszk.hu/01100/01149/html/szabodez.htm>. Double inverted commas are used throughout this essay to indicate that the text is not quotation but paraphrase, often referred to as 'translation'. In addition to their usual duties, single inverted commas signal glosses. See D. Abondolo, 'Attila József's "Szürkület" and Covert Translation', pp. 147-158 in *Central Europe*, Vol. 4, No. 2, November 2006 for a discussion of the urgency of these and related distinctions.

<sup>4</sup>'Zsigmond Móricz, Realist (1879-1942)' in August J. Molnár (ed.), *Hungarian Writers and Literature. Modern Novelists, Critics, and Poets*, New Brunswick (NJ), 1964, pp. 326-47 (338-9). Appeared originally in *American Slavic and East European Review*, 4 (1945), 165-81.

<sup>5</sup> The method of my approach is neither historical nor sociopolitical. It is primarily linguistic: I examine formal features of Szabó's use of language in the hope that a thick description of these features will go some way toward an integrated understanding of his personality and his role in the evolution of Hungarian literary and political discourse. But my method must also be metalinguistic: an awareness of the metaphors and other tropes of linguistic and literary discourse is essential if we are to view the ensemble in perspective.

<sup>6</sup> One of Szabó's artistic ancestors, Walt Whitman, encapsulated this in his *Song of Myself*: 'Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then I contradict myself,/ (I am large, I contain multitudes.)', 51:6-8.

<sup>7</sup> Gwen Jones, *Chicago of the Balkans: Budapest in Hungarian Literature 1900-1939*, London, 2013, p. 68.

<sup>8</sup> The only notable exception is Gergely Gergely's *Szabó Dezső stílusa* (= Dezső Szabó's Style), *Hargitaváralja könyvei* vol. iv., edited by János Jóna, Szeged, 1937 (hereafter: *Gergely*). This short monograph pinpoints a great many disparate features of Szabó's style, but because its approach is primarily literary rather than linguistic, it fails to show or even suggest how these features might work together or be at odds in terms of the grain of Hungarian grammar. In fairness to Gergely it should be remembered that not even a linguistic analysis carried out at that time would have been able to zero in on aspects of Szabó's noun phrase, since this grammatical concept did not become clearly delineated until the early 1950s.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Gati, in *Slavic Review*, 24, 2 (1965), pp. 330-332 (p. 331) in a review of Péter Nagy's *Szabó Dezső* (Budapest, 1964).

<sup>10</sup> Gail Stokes, 'The Social Origins of East European Politics', pp. 221-51 (226) in Daniel Ghirot (ed.), *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe. Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century*, Berkeley, 1989.

<sup>11</sup> Gyula Gombos, *Szabó Dezső*. Munich 1966, pp. 40-45. Hereafter: *SzD*.

<sup>12</sup> *SzD*, p. 46-47.

<sup>13</sup> *SzD*, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> Dezső Szabó, *Életeim. Születéseim, halálaim, feltámadásaim* ("My Lives. My births, My Deaths, My Resurrections"), volume 1, page 118. Hereafter: *Életeim*. See footnote 20 for the editions of Szabó's works cited in this essay.

<sup>15</sup> *Életeim*, volume 1, pp. 590-591; note the evidence of Szabó's high opinion of himself as an absorber of grammars. Szabó is correct in his implied assessment of both this grammar and most of the linguistic training to which he was subjected, but this does not undermine, it rather reinforces the image of Szabó as superior to those around and above him.

<sup>16</sup> See Péter Nagy, 'Szabó Dezső ideológiájánk forrásai' (The Sources of Dezső Szabó's Ideology), *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények*, 67 (1963), 701-717.

<sup>17</sup> John Lukacs, *Budapest 1900. A Historical Portrait of a City and its Culture*, Weidenfeld and London, 1983.

<sup>18</sup> Szabó contributed frequently and notoriously to *Nyugat*, but during the years of this close association his name never crops up in the correspondence of Babits, Kosztolányi, or Gyula Juhász (*SzD* p. 115). Note also his autobiographical remark '[...] az egén iránt nincs érzésem. Barátom sohasem volt.' (*Életeim* 2.53)

<sup>19</sup> This essay has had so unusually long a gestation that a full roster of acknowledgments would take several pages. Instead I here single out Eszter Tarsoly, Peter Sherwood, Gwen Jones, Péter Simoncsics, Endre Tálos, Ádám Nádasdy, and Soma Selmeczy for their practical help as well as their insights into Szabó and Hungarian grammar. Since I was able to write much of the essay only after carrying out a comprehensive re-examination of Hungarian syntax, I am especially grateful to R.M.W. Dixon for his encouraging words.

<sup>20</sup> Citations are from the following editions: the Faust (two-volume, critical) edition of *Az elsodort falu*, Budapest, 1944; the Révai (two-volume) edition of *Csodálatos élet*, Budapest 1934; and the Kriterion (two-volume) edition of *Életeim*, Bucharest, 1982.

<sup>21</sup> For a concise overview of the more important interconnexions see Alexandra Aikhenvald and R.M.W. Dixon, 'Dependencies between Grammatical Systems', *Language* 74 (1998): pp. 56-80.

<sup>22</sup> Yet larger units and techniques, such as paragraph and chapter breaks, plot structure, or narratological design must unfortunately remain outside the purview of this essay, as must his use of dialogue.

<sup>23</sup> Letters representing alliterating consonants in the Hungarian are underscored, as are the initial letters of their English paraphrases. Superscript <r> and <d> here and throughout this essay are used to label words referring to possessors and possessed in noun-phrase-internal possessive constructions; for details, see Appendix.

<sup>24</sup>Note also, in passing, the paratactic syntax and the triadic-rhopalic structure; we return to these below. As for the lexis, the neologism *reng=ő=ség* (“tremulantitude”), a collective-abstract noun built to the participle *reng=ő* ‘shaking, quaking’, is a typically Szabóesque lexical innovation. Compare *Isten vagy száz postás’ postásságát gyúrta egybe* “God must have kneaded the ‘postmanness’ of about a hundred postmen into (this) one” (*Életeim* 1.527), with *postá=s=ság* “postmanness” from *postá=s* ‘postman’.

<sup>25</sup> On the view that words may be thought of as associations of name and sense see D. Abondolo, ‘Phonosemantic Subsets in the Lexicon: Hungarian Avian Nomenclature and l’Arbitraire du Signe’, *Central Europe*, Vol. 5, No. 1, May 2007, p. 4, footnote 4; hereafter: *Avian*.

<sup>26</sup> The symbol □ here represents a syllable missing from the pattern, and is not to be confused with a missing beat or as the equivalent of a rest in *tempo giusto* musical performance.

<sup>27</sup> On the similarities of use of the etymological figure in Hebrew and Greek, see Frederick Cornwallis Conybeare and Saint George Stock, *Grammar of Septuagint Greek*, Boston (MA), 1905, especially sections 56, 81, and 82. Available 3 July 2006 at [www.ccel.org/ccel/conybeare/lxxgrammar.txt](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/conybeare/lxxgrammar.txt) For Ob-Ugrian see Robert Austerlitz, *Ob-Ugrić Metrics. The Metrical Structure of Ostyak and Vogul Folk Poetry*, Helsinki, 1958, pages 108-123.

<sup>28</sup> Loránd Benkő, (ed.), *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Ungarischen*, (six vols.), Budapest, 1992-97, pp. 30 and 31; henceforth: *EWU*. On paronyms see D. Abondolo, *A Poetics Handbook*, London, 2001, Routledge, pp. 138 ff.

<sup>29</sup> *EWU* p. 554.

<sup>30</sup> The traditional term for the class of such particles is *igekötő*. See below for more examples and discussion.

<sup>31</sup> *A vogul szóképzés*, Budapest, 1904; see also Magdolna Sz. Kispál, *A vogul igenév mondattana* (Syntax of Vogul Verbal Nominals), Budapest, 1966, especially pp. 136-40.

<sup>32</sup> His copy had once belonged to Hunfalvy, and bore Lönnrot’s dedication (*Életeim* 1.617).

<sup>33</sup> Szabó dated his decision to become a Finno-Ugrist to the first class in which he read from the Kalevala: *Nagyszerű magyar ritmusa arcon vágott, mint a márciusi szél, mintha valami ősi emlékezet rohama viharzott volna át rajtam* “Its magnificent Hungarian [sic] rhythm hit me in the face like a March wind, as if some ancestral memory were storming through me” (*Életeim* 1.591). See also footnote 65.

<sup>34</sup> Brackets here and elsewhere serve to demarcate continuous noun phrases; see appendix for details.

<sup>35</sup> This figure is not only high; it is comparable to the frequency of these three terms in a 131,842-word corpus of lyric poetry by Endre Ady, in which one finds *élet* 877, 0.7%; *magyar* 492, 0.4%; and *lélek* 488, 0.4%, for a total of 1.4%. What is striking is what these figures suggest about Szabó’s prose, reminding one of pseudo-Longinus’ alignment of Herodotus with Homer (*On the Sublime*, 13.3).

<sup>36</sup>See, for example, Zoltán Szabó, *Kis magyar stílustörténet* (A Brief History of Hungarian [Literary] Style), Budapest, 1986, pp. 303-4. He also singles out Szabó’s frequent use of comparatives and superlatives, and the central role of *accumulatio*.

<sup>37</sup>Szabó quoted by Ferenc Szilágyi, ‘A magyar versmondatt néhány újabb jelensége’ (On a few recent phenomena in the Hungarian verse sentence), in Miklós Béládi (ed.), *A magyar vers* (Hungarian Verse), Budapest, 1985, 109-21 (112).

<sup>38</sup> In one kind of canonic applicative construction, the subject of an intransitive clause becomes the agent of a transitive clause, and a peripheral argument becomes core, normally direct object. English usually has lexical rather than grammatical differences here, for example *Irene thought about Matthew* as opposed to *Irene considered Matthew*. For a detailed and up-to-date discussion of applicatives see R.M.W. Dixon, *Basic Linguistic Theory*, vol. 3, Oxford, 2012, pp. 294-342.

<sup>39</sup> Gergely singles this out first as a szabóesque stylistic trait (*Gergely* 12-13); recall our *odahetykél* ‘cockily go to meet (mountains)’ example above.

<sup>40</sup>‘Hommage aux mourants. Klasszikus nyelv és radikalizmus, II.’, in *Nyugat* 19, 2 (1914); available 4 July 2006 at <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/00144/04718.htm>.

<sup>41</sup>*Gergely* 16-17.

<sup>42</sup> There is a widespread and inaccurate notion in the linguistic literature that Hungarian nouns cannot undergo gradation.

<sup>43</sup> See the Appendix for the use of superscript suffix alternants here and elsewhere.

<sup>44</sup> As an aside in connexion with privatives it should be noted that one of Szabó’s favourite adjectives is thus formed: *vég=telen* ‘endless, infinite’. This adjective occurs 157 times in *AEF*, frequently enough to contribute to the ostinato of that work.

<sup>45</sup> I have come across no compelling argument for setting up a grammatical constituent ‘verb phrase’ in Hungarian which would be parallel to the noun phrase; for the cross-linguistic picture see R.M.W. Dixon, *Basic Linguistic Theory*, vol. I, 108-110.

- <sup>46</sup> But note that R.M.W. Dixon is at pains to distinguish true RCs from participial constructions: *Basic Linguistic Theory*, vol. 2, Oxford, 2010, p. 316 (hereafter: *BLT 2*).
- <sup>47</sup> In Hungarian clauses, features of core arguments, that is, of Subject/Agent person and number, and definiteness features of the Object, are obligatorily indexed by bound pronouns (suffixes) on finite verb forms.
- <sup>48</sup> The relative clause is here set out between accolades.
- <sup>49</sup> See J. Lotz, *Das ungarische Sprachsystem*, Stockholm, 1939, p. 164, where in keeping with the times the role of the framing NP and of adjuncts is not mentioned. For more recent accounts see B. Keszler and K. Lengyel, *Ungarische Grammatik*, Hamburg, 2008, in which postmodifying RCs are treated entirely separately (pp. 220-222) from premodifying participles (p. 91), and I. Kenesei, R. M. Vago, and A. Fenyvesi, *Hungarian*, London, 1998, in which premodification and postmodification are treated as by and large equivalent (p. 38). This treatment can be misleading: compare Dixon, *BLT 2*, p. 353.
- <sup>50</sup> The structurally similar *Schachtelsätze* (and the associated *Klammerstil*) of German prose persisted as a characteristic feature of literary German at least into Thomas Mann. For the general background see Peter von Polenz, *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*, (10<sup>th</sup>, fully revised edition edited by Norbert Richard Wolf), Berlin, 2009, page 147, with literature. The linguistic term is *erweiterter Attribut*. Note that I am not claiming that NPs with adjunct-heavy participles are restricted to certain kinds of German, or to Szabó. The construction is widely attested world-wide, most pertinently in Ob-Ugrian, with which Szabó was familiar. And what I am trying to illustrate here is the degree to which Szabó availed himself of the construction, where degree is a measure not only of quantity but also of quality.
- <sup>51</sup> Available as pages 150-157 of [http://www.nyi.bme.hu-szokoe-Porta\\_Lingua2002.doc](http://www.nyi.bme.hu-szokoe-Porta_Lingua2002.doc)
- <sup>52</sup> On the metaphors of clauses and subordination see Gerd Jendraschek, 'Subordinate, Embedded, and Dependent Clauses: A Terminological Confusion that Iatmul Can Help Disentangle', available 20 November 2012 at [http://www.academia.edu/attachments/708281/download\\_file](http://www.academia.edu/attachments/708281/download_file)
- <sup>53</sup> Doubly underscoring <ü> here and elsewhere serves to signal a derivational suffix which forms a complex adjective.
- <sup>54</sup> Cf. B. L. Gildersleeve, 'On the Stylistic Effect of the Greek Participle', *American Journal of Philology*, 1888, pp. 137-157.
- <sup>55</sup> The term is Dixon's (*BLT 2*, pp. 268ff.)
- <sup>56</sup> In the analyses of NPs to follow, the following abbreviations and conventions will be used. NPs are demarcated by brackets, with discontinuous NPs given in angle brackets. Finite verb forms have wavy underscore; conjunctions are in bold. Superscript r = possessor, superscript d = possessed. Examples: (*a falu' jegyzője<sup>d</sup>*) 'the notary of the village', (*hatalmas hangjá<sup>d</sup>nak' túlzott szétcsoválásá<sup>d</sup>val*) 'with the exaggerated wagging of his powerful voice', (*fáradt virága<sup>d</sup> egy beteg fajnak'*) 'the tired flower of a sick race', <virító zuhataga<sup>d</sup>> *yolt* <az egészségnek'> 'was a blossoming torrent of beauty'.
- <sup>57</sup> It seems clear, but is seldom noted or commented upon, that similes (unless they have become clichés like *white as a sheet*) are a more literary, and a more conscious, phenomenon than metaphor. I take it that this is so because I believe metaphor to be fundamental to, indeed constitutive of language use, while the overt assertion 'X is like Y' is secondary, derivative. See James R. Hurford, *The Origins of Meaning*, Oxford, 2007, pages 281 and 319.
- <sup>58</sup> The term *comparandum* will be used here, although the term most commonly used in the linguistic analysis of comparative constructions is *comparee*.
- <sup>59</sup> As noted by Gergely: *Gergely*, p. 22.
- <sup>60</sup> In the following exemplars the likeness stated by the simile is given in small capitals, followed by a number (2, 3, 4, as listed above) indicating the kind or kinds of Szabóesque oddness involved: see the four types outlined at the beginning of the section. Any words which encode metaphors are underscored, while those that encode the simile proper are in bold.
- <sup>61</sup> It will clear by this point that I do not expend much effort in this essay in trying to untangle metaphor from metonymy.
- <sup>62</sup> Whether such heterodyne techniques lead to a prose which is denser or more flabby is an open question; we return to it toward the end of this essay.
- <sup>63</sup> See Sonia Cristofaro, *Subordination*, Oxford, 2003, pp. 53-60 for a discussion of this terminology and the morphosyntactic distinctions it encodes.
- <sup>64</sup> One of four laws (or tendencies) proposed by Otto Behaghel at the beginning of the twentieth century; see 'Beziehung zwischen Umfang und Reihenfolge von Satzgliedern', *Indogermanische Forschungen* 25 (1909/10), 110-142. Behaghel was interested primarily in German, but his ideas have found resonance in both Indo-European (see Benjamin W. Fortson IV, *Indo-European Language and Culture. An Introduction*, Oxford, 2004, p. 34) and communication studies (theme/rheme).
- <sup>65</sup> Pentti Leino, *Language and Metre. Metrics and the Metrical System of Finnish*, Helsinki, 1986, pp. 133-4.
- <sup>66</sup> Only pilot results can be presented here. The six passages in question, A through F, are from *Életeim* 1.290, 1.273, 1.298, 1.299, 2.226 and 2.223-224.
- <sup>67</sup> See D. Abondolo, *Avian*, p. 8, footnote 27.

<sup>68</sup> Here we may recall *AEF*'s hero János's remarks to a fellow (female) train passenger to the effect that if she expects him to be ready to go to the front to die, for reasons just as patriotic he can expect her daughters to bear him children 'day and night' ('... én éppen olyan hazafias okból kívánhatom a kedves lányaitól, hogy nekem éjjel-nappal szüljenek.' *AEF* 1.225)

<sup>69</sup> In this regard his manner reminds us of that of Ezra Pound, a character with a similar grand set of talents and sense of self-importance.

<sup>70</sup> On a larger scale, parataxis has been associated with oral (as opposed to written, literate) discourse; see, for example, Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present*, New Haven, 1986, and Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London and New York: Methuen, 1982. In this connexion Szabó's early training as a Finno-Ugrist, with the concomitant exposure to oral folklore texts in related languages (and their Hungarian translations), is doubtless relevant. Its investigation however will have to be for another time.

<sup>71</sup> I thank Peter Sherwood for pointing out that this term is particularly apt in Szabó's case: his prose can exert a shaman-like or bewitching power on the reader. See Alfred Ernout, Antoine Meillet, and Jacques André (eds), *Dictionnaire de la langue latine. Histoire des mots*, Paris, 1985 (4<sup>th</sup> edition), p. 218, s.v. *fascinus*.

<sup>72</sup> Aurélien Sauvageot, who also attended the Eötvös College, was the first to comment on these parallels: 'Je me heurtai à une langue très sophistiquée, emphatique, fioriturée à souhait qui me sembla sentir l'imitation de quelque modèle étranger [...] Certains de ses effets de style rappelaient Giraudoux, et d'autre part sa verbosité faisait penser à Gabriel D'Annunzio', *Souvenirs de ma vie hongroise*, Budapest, 1988, p. 30.

<sup>73</sup> 'The metaphor of form as a "container" is problematic, tending to support the equation of content with *meaning*, implying that meaning can be "extracted" without an active process of interpretation and that form is not in itself meaningful', Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics. The Basics*, London, 2001, p. 53.

<sup>74</sup> As a postscript we note that in 2012 the figure of Szabó re-emerged as a major political and cultural factor in debate over reform of the Hungarian national curriculum. But nowhere in this debate is there a trace of an awareness of the linguistic and stylistic reasons for his fetishistic status. It is telling that in 1923, at the apogee of Szabó's notoriety, David Ross found it appropriate to excuse his brief treatment of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* by writing that if it 'has now less life in it than most of Aristotle's works, it is probably because speakers are nowadays (and rightly) inclined to rely on natural talent and experience rather than on instruction, and because hearers, though as easily swayed by rhetoric as ever, are rather ashamed of the fact and not much interested in how the trick is done.' Sir David Ross, *Aristotle*, London, 1964 (<sup>1</sup>1923), page 276.