

ATTENTION AND CREATIVE IMAGINATION IN THE WORK OF SIMONE WEIL AND JÁNOS PILINSZKY

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A late example of the major literary reception of Simone Weil is found in the work of János Pilinszky. His work was translated into English by Ted Hughes and János Csokits, and into French by Pierre Emmanuel, Lorand Gaspar and others. These translations brought Pilinszky international fame: he visited Paris and London several times and read his poetry there at international poetry festivals. The aesthetic-poetic change, which happens in the 1970s in the work of Pilinszky, certainly meets France in many ways, not only because of increased frequency to Western Europe, but also because of three areas discovered by Pilinszky: first of all, Simone Weil's body of work, secondly, the liturgical renewal that will become a model for his concept of theater, and finally access to Robert Wilson's theater. Pilinszky begins to read Simone Weil during a tormented period of creativity, using a little Franco-Hungarian dictionary. He finds in Simone Weil's work the echo and the continuation of his own characteristic themes. When he visits Paris for the first time, he buys one or two of her books probably including *La pesanteur et la grâce*² (Gravity and Grace), though he has not yet fully mastered the French language. We can imagine — according to his journal, which he suddenly abandons at this time³ — that he begins to read Simone Weil around June 1964 in aesthetic and poetic perspectives. When he restarts writing in his journal, one year after he

stopped doing so, we find sentences with an infinitive structure, unusual in the Hungarian language, which suggests the influence of Simone Weil's style. After a few lines, the name of Weil appears and her influence continues to be obvious in later works. In an interview he admits he has not learnt the French language rather the "Simone Weil" language. He takes notes on vocabulary and grammar. This encounter is preceded by expectations and is extended in the wording of an aesthetic of "immobile engagement" detailed in the *Big City Icons* essays: "The Creative Imagination and the Modern World" and "In Place of an Ars Poetica," where French expressions grafted onto the Hungarian text indicate a complete meshwork of poetic effort and a creation of theological-religious thinking.⁴

ATTENTION (WEIL AND ALAIN)

In the case of Weil and Pilinszky, the philosophy of attention offers a unique description of the mystical attitude and of the great moments of mystical life, with a metaphysical-theological conceptual grounding and, in the case of the poet, a poetical systematisation. Attention without an object is, in Weil's work, an inheritance from her professor, Alain at the École Normale Supérieure, and its roots have to be researched in the *Bhagavad Gita*⁵. Alain states: This world "deserves no respect, but only attention." This attention is focused: "one must only dare, and know to think of nothing. Firm/Assured idleness. I wouldn't say that thought would always arise from it, but if it does, its nest is made." (Ce monde "ne vaut nullement aucun respect, mais seulement attention." Cette attention est occupée : "seulement il faut oser, et savoir ne penser à rien [...] Oisiveté assurée, oisiveté occupée. Je ne dis pas que la pensée viendra toujours, mais, si elle vient, son nid est fait.")⁶

What is only a fragmentary idea in Alain's philosophical texts becomes a main pillar of a system in Weil's thought, encountered in 1963 by the poet Pilinszky. Partly under the influence of Weil's thoughts, Pilinszky shaped, in his

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² Sometimes he writes that he bought one or two Simone Weil books without knowing her, other times he writes that he read an article on her. It could be also that Canus was a reference mark at that time for Hungarian intellectuals regarding French literature. It also could be the article of Katalin Fitzeséry, "A kegyelem és a nehézkedési erő" [La pesanteur et la grâce] paru dans *Vigilia*, novembre 1950, 614-618, repris dans Simone Weil, *Ami személyes és ami szent*, Budapest, Vigilia, 1983, 308-317.

³ "A tegnap éjelen romokban talált. Nem tudok írni többé, legálábbis nem úgy, ahogy fiatalágomban tudtam. Ezzel magányos életem csödébe jutott, de azt is mondhatnám, hogy már semmi sem takarja el, állja el a halálomhoz vezető utat. [...] A költészet számomra ezennél győremlies leckét jelent, nehéz testi munkát és semmi egyebet. [...] Mártól kezdve nem vagyok költő, csak küszködő ígverő, akinek így kell vezekelnie hitűsága jármában, s kell előkészítenie halálát és

szabadságát. [...] Jancsi, sivatagos napok jönnek." János Pilinszky, *Naplók, tévedések [Diaries, fragments]*, Budapest, Osiris, 1995, 60.

⁴ Denomination introduced by Miklós Vető, "Bevezetés Simone Weil gondolatvilágába" [Introduction to Simone Weil Thought], *Magyar Műhely*, No. 10, 1964, 21-27.

⁵ About the influence of Jules Lagneau and Alain see my earlier essay: "Theatrum philosophicum: az én meghaladása." In Gizella Guibrod — Enikő Sepsí (ed.), *Simone Weil — Filozófia, misztika, esztétika* (Simone Weil — Philosophy, Mysticism, Aesthetics), Budapest, Gondolat, 2011, 57-76.

⁶ Alain, *Les arts et les dieux*, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1958, 77.

⁷ Alain, "Le penseur," in id., *Propos de littérature*, Paris, Gonthier, 1969, 93, 95.

own works, an image of passion beginning with the creation, creation being abdication, a slit between two divine beings, forming One. Passion conceived in this manner is immobile and timeless. According to Weil, Time is a boundary that God imposed on himself in reference to the existence of mankind. Eternity only reconciles with itself through time being suppressed gradually, and inside which the decreasing process takes place. Once the self is decreaded, man lives in a present time where the necessary events of this world take place. Necessity is perceptible for the artist through the same lack of finality, which is the characteristic feature of the universe. The equivalent of necessity's reign in the arts is resistance to materials and the arbitrary rules.⁸ For Weil, we could even claim that the purpose of the arts, especially that of theatre, is to make necessity tangible. One may assume that the passing of time is equivalent to the acceptance of necessity, and through this context, one can separate the reality of the dream from the objects of attachment: the duration thus being a constituent component of attention as an act. To this end, Pilinszky refers to Bergson's notion of vital force/impetus ("élan vital"), which teaches us that this vital force going against descending matter is the organizer of the organic world ("The Birth of a Work of Art," 1947). In this essay, while starting from Bergson's imagery, Pilinszky talks about the poet's work as an effort. The poem must evolve against the conventional characteristics of language and will express, one way or another, what is unique and instantaneous. He states that he prefers those poets who have overcome resistance to matter and thus become formal artists by effort rather than being born as such. Therefore, intellectual rigor does not end with some external geometric rigor, such as with Weil or Valéry (who particularly appreciated this thought).

The characteristic of the decreaded self is a passive activity that Weil calls "l'action non-agissante." This non-behaving action is a concept similar to a desire without an object and empty attention. Fundamentally, as revealed in Miklós Vető's excellent book *La métaphysique religieuse de Simone Weil*, who claims that it is all about a "compromise between a moral and metaphysical immobility proper to the decreaded self, and the necessary movement to any physical action."

Alain, as well as his master Jules Lagneau, and their disciple, Weil, were all

* Cf. J. Patricia Little, "La création artistique chez Simone Weil," *Cahiers Simone Weil*, March 1993, 29. Also: "En comparant le monde à une œuvre d'art, ce n'est pas seulement l'acte de la création mais la Providence qui se trouve assilée à l'inspiration artistique. C'est-à-dire que dans le monde comme dans l'œuvre d'art, il y a finalement sans aucune fin représentable (Simone Weil, *Intimations pré-chrétiennes*, Paris, Fayard, 1985 (1951), 23. "C'est parce que la Providence gouverne le monde comme l'inspiration gouverne la matière d'une œuvre d'art qu'elle est aussi pour nous source d'inspiration." (*Ibid.*, 40)

looking to attain a state of mind and spiritual activity beyond the restricted self (source of errors and of evil) in connection with perception as well as with judgment. Alain in *History of My Thoughts (Histoire de mes pensées)* considers this method as a means to liberate the soul from its illusions by contemplating things in the order of good judgments: "I don't think I have ever done anything else in my descriptions than to clear the world of all the mist and to see how it would be without us." ("Et je ne crois pas avoir fait autre chose, quand je décrivais, que nettoyer ce monde de toute la buée, et le voir comme il serait sans nous.")

Weil insists on attentiveness marked by consent of the retrieving self to this shaping exercise to be used against the political and intellectual crisis of the early and mid-twentieth century. Attention practiced in this way gradually develops the faculties of creative expression and of prayer as a form of compassion. Thus, attentiveness, especially when marked by consent, is for Weil the primary mode of ethical, intellectual, religious, and (of special interest here) poetic practice. This attention is not a concentrated mental effort, rather a form of stepping back from all unnecessary roles, except for the observer. Weil writes in *Waiting for God*: "Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object."⁹ It is the truth itself (by truth she intended to denote, as a disciple of Neo-Platonism, "beauty, virtue, and every kind of goodness") that acts upon the waiting, consenting, attentive subject. "The will only controls a few movements of a few muscles, and these movements are associated with the idea of a change of position of nearby objects. ... If inner purity, inspiration or truth of thought were necessarily associated with attitudes of this kind, they might be the object of will. As this is not the case, we can only beg for them. ... What could be more stupid than to tighten up our muscles and set our jaw about virtue, or poetry, or the solution of a problem? Attention is something quite different."¹⁰

Consent, which is claimed in "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations," as a condition for exercising attention effectively, is not correlative to the willful function of an autonomous agent.

⁸ Alain, *Les arts et les dieux*, op. cit., 76.

⁹ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. by Emma Craufurd, New York, Harper and Row, 1973, 111. Qtd. in Katy-Wright-Bushman, "A Poetics of Consenting Attention: Simone Weil's Prayer and the Poetry of Denise Levertov," *New Christianity and Literature*, Vol. 62, No. 3, 2013, 371.

¹⁰ Simone Weil, "Attention and Will," in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. and intro. Siân Miles, New York, Grove Press, 1986, 211. (qtd. in Katy Wright-Bushman, op.cit., 372.)

This act of consent may be expressed, or it may not be, even tacitly; it may not be clearly conscious, although it has really taken place in the soul. Very often it is verbally expressed although it has not in fact taken place. But whether expressed or not, the one condition suffices: that it shall in fact take place. To anyone who does actually consent to directing his attention and love beyond the world, toward the reality that exists outside the reach of all human faculties, it is given to succeed in doing so.¹²

Autonomy, evil and human finitude, in Weil's series of images also used by Pilinszky, are nailed to the cross of the time and space of existence. As an effect of Grace and the autonomous creature's consent, the Self can disappear gradually. This suppression of Self (or unselfing, the term used in a similar sense by Iris Murdoch) is the contrary of creation, thus de-creation ("décréation"). Men living in space and time are not able to avoid being the center of their own vision and imagination, which — opposed to pure intelligence without a centre — secretes illusions, the essential one of which is the autonomous existence itself. In Weil's thought, imagination is never creative, it is always a fabricator. Intelligence penetrates necessity's domain, which is also a structure and represents God as Power in the universe. "Je puis, donc je suis" ("I can, thus I exist"), she writes in her early works. It is true that once we understand the conceivable laws defining a situation, our action should follow it in a natural way, although autonomy impedes this kind of coincidence between understanding and acting. Personal will has to be instructed on a daily basis by intelligence in order to become something that also fades merely by the fact of its own exertion (exercise). Will and imagination, as well as their interface in the human action, were also the basic principles of Alain's philosophy.

CEREMONIAL AND BODY

Weil, like her professor at the École Normale Supérieure, Alain, ascribes an important role to the ceremonial in the process of exceeding the self. Alain regards it as a realization of politeness/courtesy/civility; according to Weil, the ceremonial emerges from the "uncreated" (incrété) by decreasing meaning; while meaning is dissolved by the fact that it is practiced, like the will and the self. In *Waiting for God* Weil describes that God is present in religious practices

— if these are pure —, just as in the beauty of the world. Every religious act, every ritual, every liturgy is a form of the recitation of the name of the Lord, which must have real power. "Toute pratique religieuse, tout rite, toute liturgie est une forme de la récitation du nom de Seigneur, et doit en principe avoir réellement une vertu."¹³

According to Alain, politeness/courtesy is "the mastering over one's self," which in a narrow sense conforms to space, time and to habits. In the "*De la politesse*" (*About Politeness*) he emphasizes that the link between the poem and music is the rule, the measurable character and that both originate from ceremonies, having a wider outreach than social pleasures ("dont l'objet est plus étendu que de régler les plaisirs de la société."¹⁴ Alain warns us of the mistake of seeing the reflection of our soul in things, advocating the consideration of them as a series of facts, which are in a causal relationship with other things since the body is also a thing. In the "*Le choix des mots*" (*The choice of words*) he differentiates between the fool, the poet and the wise person. The fool is the most honest, moreover the most real because he interprets everything on the reduced level of pure passion and innocently expresses himself, his being. Therefore, he is open to everything. The wise man is quite different; he has sworn to be only that which he wants to be. He chooses, so he can reject. Thus, he rejects to be everything and to proclaim everything at the same time. Between these two extremes, there is the poet, who wants to be a universal receiver without losing his mind. Hence he regulates himself as the wise man and prescribes laws unto himself. However, unlike the wise man, he regulates himself inside his own body. He gives rhythm to his steps, to his breathing, to his heart in accordance with the moment; but it is an unrepentant rhythm. He counts and he vows to count well. For Alain, the poetic work is also mainly physical: the first effect of the imagination always appears in the body. Pure imagination is without thought, act without thinking ("sans pensée aucune"), like the ceremonial. (Alain gives the example of a dreamer who takes part in a beheading, unaware of being the victim and without forming an expressible opinion about it, he only feels pain at his nape.¹⁵) The metaphor is the part of the human body, and it approaches the closest to sorrow, but sonority and rhythm do not allow him to throw himself into it or to return to it.¹⁶ Consequently, good

¹² Simone Weil, "Draft for a Statement of Human Obligations," in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, *op.cit.*, 202 (qtd. in Katy Wright-Bushman, *op.cit.*, 373).

¹³ Simone Weil, *Sur la science*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. Espoir, 1966, 54-55.

¹⁴ Simone Weil, *Attente de Dieu*, Paris, Éd. du Vieux Colombier, 1950, 138.

¹⁵ Alain, "De la politesse," in *Id.*, 81 *chapitres sur l'esprit et les passions*, Paris, Camille Bloch, 1921, 253.

¹⁶ Alain, *Propos de littérature*, *op.cit.*, 12-13.

¹⁷ Alain, "De l'imagination," in *Id.*, *Propos sur le bonheur*, Paris, Gallimard, 1928, 27. *Ibid.*, 27.

poetry is more powerful than the imagination because it has measure. Measure, rhythm and sonority are nothing more than forms of courtesy.

CREATIVE IMAGINATION

Ted Hughes, the finest translator of Pilinszky's work, states that "he lets it [the world] strike full on his own body."¹⁹ In Pilinszky's essay on creative imagination presented at a conference in Poigny, we can rediscover Weil's idea on artistic creation. (In two essays by Pilinszky published later on in *Big City Icons*, "In Place of an Ars Poetica" and "Creative imagination and the modern world" we find even Weil's original French expressions in the Hungarian texts.)

I believe that during the Fall, not only our mind has been muddled and our will has inclined towards evil, but also our imagination has fallen into sin. By this error, reality and incarnation in the world has been damaged, the last accomplishment has been assured once originally trusted to our imagination. The Fall has reduced creation's reality to the unreality of simple existence. Since then, art has become the morality of imagination: an exhaustive labor contributing to the accomplishment of reality and that of the incarnation of creation. *Et incarnatus est*: it could be the last sentence, the authentic seal of all masterpieces. This accomplishment of the incarnation has an uttermost spiritual nature, and like prayer or love, travels freely over time and distance. It has a predilection for choosing the past or more so, the tragic, the irremediable, the shameful and the unsolvable. In art, praying for the dead means incarnating them.²⁰

Je crois que, lors de la Chute, ce n'est pas seulement notre esprit qui s'embrouilla et notre volonté qui s'inclina vers le Mal, mais c'est aussi notre imagination qui tomba dans le péché. Par cette faute s'ébréchèrent la réalité et l'incarnation du monde, se fissurèrent l'accomplissement et l'achèvement derniers qui, lors de la création, avaient originellement été confiés à notre imagination. La Chute réduisit la réalité de la création à l'irréalité de la simple existence. C'est depuis ce temps-là que l'art est devenu la morale de l'imagination: un labeur épuisant, une contribution au rétablissement, à l'accomplissement de la réalité et de l'incarnation de la création. *Et incarnatus est*: c'est ce qui depuis, pourrait être la phrase finale, le sceau d'authenticité de tout chef-d'œuvre. L'accomplissement de cette incarnation est de nature absolument spirituelle et, pareil à la prière ou à l'amour, traverse librement les étapes du temps les plus

diverses. Il choisit avec prédilection le passé et, là encore, le tragique, l'irremédiable, le scandaleux, l'insoluble. Prier pour les morts, dans l'art, c'est les incarner.²¹

Time is broken in the moment of *incarnatus est*. According to Pilinszky, this Latin expression is the final stage, the seal of authenticity of a masterpiece, while Weil, on the other hand, uses it as a philosophical and theological generality. Disintegrated time is characteristic of the "pure event,"²² taking shape in the poem through the perpetual, immobile, the non-accomplishment of time such as it is described in the poem, "Passion, or Auschwitz, or the Fable for KZ — oratorio." This Oratorio for a Concentration Camp became a universal symbol of the tragedy of human existence. The texts are considered to be a prayer for forgiveness in regards to the horror of Auschwitz, on the part of a Roman Catholic, non-Jewish intellectual (Pilinszky). With compassion in art, according to Pilinszky, the poem may incarnate irremediable past events as a *praesens perfectum perpetuum* (instead of a *praesens perfectum continuum*), because Passion has not only an impact on present time, but it constantly reoccurs. These poems highlight the incarnation process in art originating from de-personalization and its consequences in the spacio-temporal relations within the poem. Concentration Camp experiences evoked in *On the Third Day* (Harmadnapon) are purified to abstraction in *Big City Icons* and become a universal Passion: the act stripped of all temporality becomes independent from the actor as well as from the sufferer. It becomes intangible and irremediable: a real past. "In a glass-cased silence," "the butcher-boys" wash themselves, move, live, but the real presence belongs to "what has happened/ somehow cannot even now finish."²³ Within Weil's words found in "Venice saved" (*Venise sauvée*), we could state that misfortune, the destructor of the Self takes away a piece of reality. The corresponding action itself, if it is ill, is as harmful to the actor as for the bearer. (Action correspondante, si elle est mauvaise, "fait un mal analogue à celui qui l'accomplit et à celui qui la subit".)

¹⁹ János Pilinszky, "Le monde moderne et l'imagination créatrice," in Id., *L'imagination créatrice, actes de la rencontre internationale organisée par la Fondation pour une Entrée Intellectuelle Européenne*, Poigny-La-Forêt, 9-13 octobre 1970, mis en forme par Roselyne Chenu, avant-propos de Pierre Emmanuel, Neuchâtel, Éd. de La Baconnière, 1971, 247-248.

²⁰ Cf. Jean Baudrillard concept of "pure event" in *La transparence du Mal*, Paris, Galilée, 1990 (*A rossz transzparenciája*, Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 1997).

²¹ "Passion" transl. by Ted Hughes in János Pilinszky's *The Desert of Love*, London, Anvil Press Poetry, 1989, 53.

¹⁹ Ted Hughes, "János Pilinszky," *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1976, 79.
²⁰ Translation by the author.

Passion

Only the warmth of the slaughter-house,
its geranium pungency, its soft shellac,
only the sun exits.

Fable

Once upon a time
there was a lonely wolf
lonelier than the angels.

In a glass-cased silence
the butcher-boys wash down. Yet what has
happened
somehow cannot even now finish.²⁴

He happened to come to a village.
He fell in love with the first house he saw.

Auschwitz

I can be no more than four or five,
and at my age the world
or – if you like – reality
in a word, everything that exists
two years or eighty years,
a shoe of a hundredweight
a jacket of several tons,
and above all, what lies ahead –
is exactly five or six years old.²⁵

Already he loved its walls,
the caresses of its bricklayers.
But the windows stopped him.

In the room sat people.
Apart from God nobody ever
found them so beautiful
as this childlike beast.

So at night he went into the house.
He stopped in the middle of the room
and never moved from there any more.

He stood all through the night, with wide eyes
and on into the morning when he was beaten
to death.²⁶

Decreation becomes the basis of a new approach of “*imitatio Christi*,” not only in its theological or ethical aspect but in the aesthetic application of *kenósis* (as an analogy for “*décréation*”), in some contemporary poetic or theatrical works (Pilinszky). “The poet produces the beautiful by fixing his attention on something real. (...) The authentic and pure values – truth, beauty, and goodness – in the activity of a human being are the result of one and the same

act, a certain application of the full attention to the object.”²⁷ writes Weil. In the paper by János Pilinszky presented in Poigny entitled “Le monde moderne et l’imagination créatrice,” Pilinszky calls “engagement immobile” — he uses the French expression used by Weil — a state of attentive contemplation. This act of attention, as we saw in “Fable,” is engaged in space and time (“He stopped in the middle of the room/and never moved from there anymore./He stood all through the night with wide eyes”). This attention is the terrestrial image of one of God’s attributes (creative thought), and also enables us to create in a way reality does, or alter it as prayers do. The enlarged aesthetics of obedience imaged by Weil as a penholder (“*Porte-plume*”) is further radicalized in Pilinszky’s latter writing by the image of the Scribe.

Exhortation

Not the respiration. The gasping.
Not the wedding table. The falling
scraps, the chill, the shadows.
Not the gesture. Not the hysteria.
The silence of the hook is what you must note.

Intellect

Ne a lélekzérével. A zihálást.
Ne a nászasztalet. A lehellő
Maradékot, hideg árnyakat.
Ne a mozduliot. A kapkodást.
A kampó csönkjét, azt jegyezd.

Remember
what your city, the everlasting city
has not forgotten.
With its towers, its roofs,
its living and dead populace.
Then you may make known,
perhaps, even in your day,
what is alone
worthy the annunciation

Akkor talán még napjaidban
hírtől adhatod azt, miről
hírt adnod itt, egyedül érdemes.
Írnok, akkor talán nem jártál itt hiába.

Scribe
then perhaps you will not have passed in vain²⁸

²⁴ János Pilinszky, *The Desert of Love*, op.cit., 53.

²⁵ Transl. by Peter Jay and Adam Makkai, in Adam Makkai (ed.), *In Quest of the Miraculous Stage: The Poetry of Hungary*, Chicago, Atlantis-Centauro, 2000

²⁶ Transl. by Ted Hughes, in Miklós Vajda (ed.), *Modern Hungarian Poetry*, Budapest, Corvina Press, 1977, 149-150.

²⁷ Simone Weil, “Attention and Will,” in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. and intro. Siân Miles, New York, Grove Press, 1986, 214 (qtd. in Katy Wright-Bushman, op.cit., 376).

²⁸ Transl. by Ted Hughes, in Miklós Vajda (ed.), *Modern Hungarian Poetry*, Budapest, Corvina Press, 1977, 152.

The central aspect of this image of the scribe is neither submission, nor the Platonic meaning of *mania*²⁹ but rather its immobility, this immovable center of the Passion, where the Scribe takes hold. The act of writing is not a foolish deed characterized by a lack of responsibility but engaged once again in space — and not in Time's historical sense. In this respect, the artist becomes a medium.

Pilinszky, in his Diary, borrows the Biblical sentence, "Follow-me" to mark the evangelical aspect of this aesthetic. Pilinszky considers any masterpiece as a paraphrase. Creative imagination is an abandonment, a passive creation.³⁰ That is the reason why in Weil's writing, translation becomes the image of the creative act.

It is as passive as the prayer, though the relationship of attention to prayer must be investigated a little bit more in depth. For Weil, the recitation of poetry, as well as the recitation of the name of God in the ceremonial mentioned on several occasions, had "the virtue of a prayer" precisely at the moment of her powerful conversion experience. While staying at a Benedictine monastery in Solesmes in January 1938 Weil was introduced by a young Catholic Englishman to seventeenth-century English metaphysical poets and to George Herbert's "Love (III)." Weil writes in *Waiting for God*, "I used to think I was merely reciting [Herbert's Love] as a beautiful poem but without my knowing it, the recitation had the virtue of a prayer. It was during one of those recitations that, as I told you, Christ himself came down and took possession of me."³¹ The recitation functioned as an effective channel for this experience of the transcendental Other incarnated through Weil's attention to the words of the poem. It is not less significant that the poem itself is sacramental in matter, describing the lyric subject's hesitant participation in a Eucharistic meal with Love. ("Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back" Herbert begins, ending finally with that entrance into the church space that structures the volume of poems *The Temple* ending with "Love": "You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat: / So I did sit and eat."³²)

God, who descends to the world with his love (incarnated by Christ), also inscribes his attributes into the physical world: the numbers, the physical principles, which the decreed Self attempts to decipher through attention in the course of daily practice. These codes can only become signs to full attention. Only intellectual attention is capable of recognizing the necessity of relations,

²⁹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, Harvey Yunis (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 244A-245A; 249D, 265B.

³⁰ "Auprès d'elle la fantaisie [selon Baudelaire] serait le péché véniel, l'éternelle maladie infantile de l'imagination." (János Pilinszky, "Le monde moderne et l'imagination créatrice," in *op.cit.*, 247).

³¹ Quid, in English by Miles, *op.cit.* 19 and Katy-Wright-Bushman, *op.cit.*, 376.

³² Quid, in Katy-Wright-Bushman, *op.cit.*, 376.

constituting the reality of our world. These necessary (necessity) connections represent reality as being the target of intellectual attention in action (as in mathematics). This attention, the creative attention, is also the worldly image of one of God's attributes as described in *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes (Intuitions of Christianity among the Greeks)*: "God creates through the act of thinking. Though we do not create anything by intellectual attention, still in our own sphere of action we generate reality in a manner." [Dieu crée par l'acte de penser. Nous, par l'attention intellectuelle, nous ne créons certes pas, nous ne produisons aucune chose, mais pourtant dans notre sphère nous suscitons en quelque sorte de la réalité.³³]

Creating reality derives from the recognition of necessity and the relations representing this necessity, as a result of the maintenance and daily practice of attention:

The regard of the right-angled triangle for those relations, which forbids stepping out from the circle whose diameter is identical with its hypotenuse, is analogous to the behavior of that man who abstains from obtaining power and money by cheating. The first case can be considered as a perfect model for the second one. We can say the same when we notice the mathematical necessity in the material: the accuracy of the floating objects, which emerge from the water just as much as their density requires, no more no less. Heraclitus said: "The sun does not exceed its boundaries, otherwise the Erynnises, the maid-servants of justice, would catch him in the act." In the things there is an unbrable affection for their places in the world-order. Man can only show loyalty like this when reaching perfection and becoming identical with his purpose. The observation of the loyalty of entities, either in the visible world itself, or in the mathematical or analogous relations, can help us to reach it as an efficient instrument. The first teaching of contemplation is not to choose but to contribute to the existence of all that is existing. This universal acceptance is the same as separation and even the seemingly legitimate affection can be an obstacle. Therefore one must never forget that there is light for every living creature and entity. The image of the will of the creative God, is the image of God, who is bearing every living creature. To this creative will our consent must be connected.³⁴

[Il] y a une analogie entre la fidélité du triangle rectangle à la relation qui lui interdit de sortir du cercle dont son hypoténuse est le diamètre et celle d'un homme qui, par exemple, s'abstient d'acquiescer du pouvoir ou de l'argent au prix d'une fraude. La

³³ Simone Weil, *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*, Paris, Fayard, 1985, 155.

³⁴ Translation by the author.

première peut être regardée comme un parfait modèle de la seconde. On peut en dire autant, quand on aperçoit la nécessité mathématique dans la matière, de la fidélité des corps flottants à sortir de l'eau précisément autant que l'exige leur densité, ni plus ni moins. Héraclite disait : „Le soleil ne dépassera pas ses limites; autrement les Erinyes, servantes de la Justice, le prendrait en flagrant délit.” Il y a dans les choses une fidélité incorruptible à leur place dans l'ordre du monde, fidélité dont l'homme peut présenter l'équivalent seulement une fois parvenu à la perfection, une fois devenu identique à sa propre vocation. La contemplation de la fidélité des choses, soit dans le monde visible lui-même, soit dans les relations mathématiques ou analogues, est un puissant moyen d'y parvenir. Le premier enseignement de cette contemplation est de ne pas choisir, de consentir également à l'existence de tout ce qui existe. Ce consentement universel est la même chose que le détachement, et l'attachement même le plus faible ou bien le plus légitime en apparence y fait obstacle. C'est pourquoi il ne faut jamais oublier que le lumière luit également sur tous les êtres et toutes les choses. Elle est ainsi l'image de la volonté créatrice de Dieu qui supporte également tout ce qui existe. C'est à cette volonté créatrice que notre consentement doit adhérer.^{35]}

With unselfing, a basis for “objective” poetry (I mean poetry of objects) is immediately offered. In Pilinszky's poetry, all objects, as well as living creatures are of equal rank, the “creatura” in its Latin form, is as objective as an “empty garden chair.”³⁶ Objects have undergone a metamorphosis: stripped bare in crime, they achieve their purest function, and thanks to this metamorphosis, become “letters of the century”; these objects are letters composing the poems, as immobile witnesses praying like the “creature” in “Apocrypha: “God sees that I am standing in the sun.”³⁷ These objects have suffered and finally arrived in the reality of the past, also possessing the ability of being present. The lack of hierarchy is also perceptible in the structure of the poem, “Van Gogh”: paradoxically, numbered sequences would suggest a linear reading and a consecutive relation, thus a built-up structure, on one hand, and, on the other, sequences that are abruptly linked in matter creating a double effect on the reader: an autonomy of sequences accompanied by the impossibility of any hierarchy between them.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 156-157.

³⁶ Maknai, *op.cit.*, 965. (“Apocrypha”)

³⁷ “Látja Isten, hogy állok a napon” (“Apokrif”), “A Kreatúra, Az Aml / Könyörög, mutatója magát.” (“Nagyvárosi ikonok”).

Van Gogh

1

They undressed in the dark.
They lay down, they fell asleep.
While you, in the glare,
wept and pondered.

2

Night was falling.
In the ramshackle heat
the sun came paper close.
Everything stopped.
A ball of iron also stood here.

3

Lamb of the world, lupus in fabula,
I am burning
in the glass cabinet of the present tense.³⁸

The most remarkable image of this immobility without hierarchy is the “icon” stated as a model by Pilinszky in *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton*, as well as in his lecture³⁹ delivered at Sorbonne University in June 1972. Iconicity of poetry and iconicity of meaning, according to the “verbal icon” of Wimsatt

³⁸ Transl. by Ted Hughes, in János Pilinszky's *The Desert of Love, op.cit.*, 52.

³⁹ In this essay, four years before the publication of *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton*, he already uses this image (the French text is not modified only if there is an evident misspelling): “Une chose est certaine : le temps de notre culture s'écoule autrement que chez vous. Pour illustrer cela, j'aime comparer les icônes russes et la peinture européenne. Des métamorphoses et d'innombrables changements de forme caractérisent cette dernière, tandis que les icônes russes se sont perpétuées immobiles à travers les siècles. Dans cet art seul l'indolence de l'humanité communale les phases du temps dans la langue inanalysable de la qualité. [...] Notre éternelle nostalgie fut la grande variabilité de l'esprit occidental, nourrie de la conviction du progrès. Mais notre réalité fut toujours une certaine durée sans temps, celle des icônes, d'une qualité emprisonnée qu'on tient toujours et jamais. La tension dramatique propre à toute culture de l'Europe de l'Est découle de cette nostalgie et de cette réalité. C'est l'œuvre de Dostojévski qui en témoigne de la manière la plus féconde.” “De quelques problèmes fondamentaux de l'art hongrois contemporain à la lumière de la pensée de Simone Weil.” The text was published also in two reviews in Québec and in France: “De quelques problèmes fondamentaux de l'art hongrois contemporain à la lumière de la pensée de Simone Weil,” *Liberté* (Montréal), XIV, n° 6 1972, 14-19 (à l'occasion d'une rencontre québécoise internationale des écrivains: “L'écriture et l'errance”), and in a slightly modified version in “Regard sur l'art hongrois dans l'optique de Simone Weil,” *Études*, mai 1973, 727-30.)

and Ricoeur, rather than in the sense that Peirce uses it, are the characteristic features of Pilinszky's work, and stating this is not a tautology. Immobility of the transmitter, thanks to the immobile center where enunciation is born, is incarnated in the visual immobility of one's language, also known as silence which then produces an effect of theatricality, a scene emerging from one's imagination. The original act, in other words, the eventuality of the past transposed beyond Passion's timeless arrival and thus becoming reality, is expressed by an immobile image, or icon (a pure event). This pure event is rooted in necessity, a central point of Passion, where the poem is created: according to Weil "n'être qu'un intermédiaire [...] entre la page blanche et le poème"⁴⁰ (to be only an intermediate between the white page and the poem). Pilinszky in paraphrasing Weil, states that passing Time as a characteristic of all genuine acts, goes from the "relativity of History" to the totality of the "pure, immobile event," the main axis of any real action.⁴¹ This pure event is the contrary of a murder, which is always empty and unreal. Murderers live in this "eternal conditional mood."⁴²

The same rejection of the murderer can be observed in a poetic description of *Deadman Glance* by Robert Wilson, written by Pilinszky in his "novel of a dialogue" as he calls his *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton*, who was the principle and only professional actress in Wilson's early 1970s period. Pilinszky also wrote some poems related to this theatrical experience embodying the ideal theatre, which Weil called "immobile theatre." Pilinszky, also inspired by Wilson wrote his own "paper theater" as he called it, not without any connection to Mallarmé's "théâtre de la Pensée" (theater of Thought):

⁴⁰ "N'être qu'un intermédiaire entre la terre inculte et le champ labouré, entre les données du problème et la solution, entre la plage blanche et le poème, entre le malheureux qui a faim et le malheureux rassasié," ("La nécessité et l'obésité," in *La pesanteur et la grâce*, Paris, Plon, 1988, 57)

⁴¹ "Ars poetica helyett" [In Place of an Ars Poetica]. "A múltó idő a történetrelativitásból a "tiszta történet" totalitásába, minden igaz cselekedet eleve mozgáslatlan tengelyébe vezet. Ez a "tiszta történet" azonban már teljes egészében "mozgáslatlan", sajátos módon függetlenül és egyetemes érvényű valóság, vagyis szöveg ellentét a mérényletnek, mely mindig tűrs, viszonylagos és irreális." (*Pilinszky János összegyűjtött versei*, Budapest, Századvég, 1992, 83)

⁴² Pilinszky uses the French word "conditionnel" instead of its Hungarian equivalent.

Crime and punishment
(*For Sheryl Sutton*)

Stone Wall and Fiesta
(*Homage to Robert Wilson*)

Imagination all walled up
keeps on, keeps on repeating this--

Is it the motion of the stabbing knife, and
after the unhappy stations of the hand?

On the electric-chair-throne of the moment
the face is still there,
the nape of a neck dipped into rock,
a splendid hand--
your gappy, porous presence.

Is it the interrupted melodies,
the dishevelled fiestas and this beyond
the lights of the confused chandelier?

The summer's still on.

Before the wall? Or behind the wall?
What happens, what is it that really happens
during the unhappy and horrendous
time of every one of our actions?⁴⁴

Queen, let go of your sceptre.⁴³

I discovered in the Wilson Archives of the Butler Library at Columbia University that Robert Wilson was also looking for a ritualistic theater, a kind of ceremonial important to Alain, Weil and Pilinszky in the process of the decreation of the Self.

Box 81: "Performing jobs" label. Letter of Robert Wilson to Antony Scully in September 1970 about Woodstock College program, Center for Religion and Worship, New York.

I wouldn't know what my liturgy is until I wrote it, or saw one that was very close to my own. Generally I think the modern liturgy, the one that comes closest to expressing modern intellectual consciousness consists of a constant flaying out of mind and body images from a receding and often disintegrating spiritual consciousness. My biggest problem concerning liturgy consists of modern man's divorce and dislocation from his once central focal areas: birth, death, god, initiation, brotherhood. Modern man seems to be lost inside his own insanely personal hieroglyphics. How to relate these to a central focus? Of course, the power of art is now of great importance. To crystallize, to bring us back to our living center. But does it still exist? Have we already lost it? Are we in the process of trying to evolve a new one? Can liturgy help us in this process? Is art our enemy leading us

⁴³ Adam Makkaï, *op.cit.*, 960.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 959.

further and further away, making it more and more difficult for us? The mind is too active, the spirit too still.

Another letter dated August 23 1970:

I've always believed that ritual is the heart of things. Somehow plays seem to revolve furiously around ritualistic activity. The only hitch is, that artists usually stumble on it without knowing it. Those like Peter Brook, in his version of Seneca's Oedipus, who go directly after a ritualistic interpretation often botch it up. If too much of a scheme gets in the head of the participants the life can go out of the work. Genet is very interesting ritualistically with his inverted Catholicism, with his fascination with the Mass, with his need for good in order to spur on the evil he worships. Religion and drama just have to get together again. Grotowski's idea about about being a secular saint. After all, the roots of drama were religious, some people think. [...] We have to recover the tragic vision: that man is temporal, finite, doomed to death and oblivion. Seems that people are more interested in the Eslin Institute and the varied experiences of the Kama Sutra. Transcend the flesh. Burn out the flesh. Grotowski's idea. [...] Not in a pseudo-philosophical abstract way, but by really applying the hot tongs of drama to the participants. A little Artaud. Scald them. [...] A true and deep approach to and appreciation of life will, I'm sure, be ritualistic."

Finally we can conclude that all these expressions: empty attention, creative imagination, ritualistic theater, a poem being a prayer or a ceremonial, artistic presence, etc. all express teleological aspirations rather than concrete or realized poetic, intellectual or spiritual programs. These are aspirations for being images of God, who Himself also created through his Word. The trajectory seems to be a "via negative," an abandonment, a passive but vigilant act of attention by the hunter, who is ready when the beast finally appears.

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