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THESES

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
The Definitive Swamp (*La palude definitiva*) – Last Work of Giorgio
Manganelli

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1. Preliminaries to the research, propositions

Giorgio Manganelli, translator and associate professor, published his first literary works in the 1960. His works are not known in Hungary. So far only a few of his short works have been published in the Hungarian language; however, neither his name nor his oeuvre is known in Hungary. Manganelli lived in Milan and then in Rome; during the Second World War he worked as a teacher in a secondary school, and later he taught English literature in the Rome University and he was also engaged to translation of fiction. He published his first novels in his 40s, and then he gave up his position at university and started to work for publishers and daily papers. He was a writer creating in isolation and with a specific literary approach; he was a member of Gruppo 63, however, he maintained a friendship significant in literary terms only with Italo Calvino. Literary criticism neglected his works until his death, and then his life-partner, Ebe Flamini administered his bequest, and she reviewed, corrected and issued his works not published before. Apart from all manuscripts and typed works of the writer she presented the manuscript archive 'Centro di ricerca sulla tradizione manoscritta di autori moderni e contemporanei' at the University of Pavia the whole of his library which included approximately eighteen thousand volumes as well as the walnut shelves on which Manganelli kept his books in his home in Rome. Another friend of the writer, Maria Corti administered the bequest in the manuscript archive, and in 1991 a separate room was constructed where the writer's manuscripts can be studied and walnut shelves were also placed there with the books on

them which Manganelli read and had around while writing. Then Università degli Studi di Pavia hosting the manuscript room became the centre of the research on Manganelli in April 1991. In May 1992 a conference was held to the memory of Manganelli and an exhibition of his manuscripts and printed works was organized under the title *Per Griorgio Manganelli*. These events were followed by additional conferences and issue of volumes of essays and studies, such as *Le foglie messaggere. Scritti in onore di Giorgio Manganelli* (2000). Apart from studies, monographs were also published. First the book by Graziella Pulce was published which analyses the oeuvre of Manganelli in four chapters and provides a bibliography with 1,720 items covering all printed works of Manganelli. Later Pulce compiled another volume since additional works by Manganelli had been published. *La luce nera. Teoria e prassi nella scrittura di Giorgio Manganelli* by Mattia Cavadini focuses on Manganelli's poetics and narrative structures. Silvia Pegoraro also discusses the oeuvre in her study "*Il «fool» degli inferi. Spazio e immagine in Girogio Manganelli*", while Menechella Grazia places the ideas of chat and lie in focus of the study in her monograph named *Il felice vanverare*. Mirko Zilahi de Gyurgyokai analyses the major concepts determining the texts in his book "*Vademecum manganelliano. Psicoanalisi, linguaggio, letteratura e mezzogna in Girogio Manganelli*". Giuditta Isotti Rosowsky applies intertextual approaches in her monograph "*Giorgio Manganelli. Una scrittura dell'eccesso*".

Several volumes of essays and studies have been published on Manganelli's fiction. The first one edited by Viola Papetti, "*Le foglie Messaggere*", was published in 2000, which contains various papers discussing Manganelli's style, his approach toward poetics, heraldry and nihilism. In 2001 a thick volume entitled *La penombra mentale* was published under the editorship of Roberto Deidier, in which there are no articles but it is a collection of most significant articles and interviews on Manganelli as well as those written or given by him from 1960 until his death. They cover such issues as psychoanalysis, Neo-Avant-Garde, fiction, theory of literature of Manganelli and poetic issues related to writing. In 2006 another volume of essays was published with the title *Riga 25*. Beside the essays the volume contains certain private writings of Manganelli not published before, such as diaries, notes and reviews.

Research on Manganelli's works is going on at present as well; a scientific conference is organized in Pavia every year, a number of researchers are attracted by unexplored or partly explored manuscripts, consequently, the critical elaboration of Manganelli's oeuvre has not been completed at all.

His fiction is featured of lack of stories, scenes and time dimensions and in many cases even of protagonists. Writing is a psychological process for him; it is not a therapy but an inevitable action. He was involved in psychoanalysis with Ernst Bernhard, a follower of Jung's practising in Rome; Manganelli became a writer after the death of the psychologist. Jung psychology determined the relation of the writer to creation. Out of the periods of Italian

literature Manganelli appreciated Baroque most; he was fascinated by the language of Baroque works, and he drew a lot from the theological-legal and political special language. I believe that symbols are the most suitable means to approach his fiction; to this I chose *La palude definitiva* (The Definitive Swamp) to be the subject of a detailed analysis. My paper is not only an analysis but it is also meant to be a canonisation attempt. Out of researchers Menechella, Isotti Rosowsky and Zilahi De' Gyurgyokai agree that the posthumously published work represents the top of the writer's prose.

The oeuvre of Manganelli embraces thirty years, which cannot be divided into periods, since he published his first prosaic works relatively late, at the age of 42. All his works are very similar in spirit and they show the same concept of theory of literature. The writer did not intend to tell stories and he was not interested in novelty or fame, but he found creation itself and the nights he spent in his study exciting; his fiction can be considered even as a metalanguage. The game was of importance to him; he was interested in the creation and polished style.

I intend to present the literary world of Giorgio Manganelli through his last work entitled *La palude definitiva*. It is a monologue consisting of thirty chapters. The title has no official translation in Hungarian, I named it "*A végső mocsár*" (The Definitive Swamp). I discuss some of the possible alternatives for translating the title within the analysis. The first publication of the work was posthumous, which raises the question whether it is a completed

work or not. I have proved the completeness of the work by philological analysis of the only existing typescript.

When analysing the novel, the basic issue is interpretation of the symbol system of the novel. Metaphors are the main means for creation for Giorgio Manganelli and he builds various dimensions within the works by flowing metaphors, and then a new idea arising makes him let the former ones pass away and he restarts his conceptual structures from new bases. Manganelli uses a number of symbols in his works which appear again and again from work to work in many cases and gain new meaning. The main symbols in the novel are the swamp, fire, horse hood, labyrinth appearing in visions, garden and theatre, nil and co-regent. In relation to the latter I also analysed the role of classical elements in the novel.

2. Methodology

The symbols used by Giorgio Manganelli are recurring in some respects; his metaphors wander from work to work and appear again and again with new meaning. I did not intend to analyse all works in details since *La palude definitiva* (The Definitive Swamp) contains everything concentrated that appeared in the other pieces of his oeuvre. That is why I have organized my dissertation as follows: First I present the literary world of Giorgio Manganelli, his views relating to theory of literature, the periods of his life significant in literary terms, and then I touch upon certain works which are essential in view of the creation of *La palude definitiva* (The

Definitive Swamp). I devote a relatively long chapter to the reception of the novel, conditions of writing, the original typescript of the novel and finally to the analysis of the symbols appearing in the novel.

The thirty chapters of the work constitute a monologue with dreams and illusory moments; for surveying them the means I used were provided by Jung psychology.

My dissertation is an attempt to disclose all the information and conditions that may help the reader approach and enter the closed and mysterious literary world of Giorgio Manganelli through the posthumously published novel *La palude definitiva* (The Definitive Swamp), for this – beyond the philological analysis of the manuscript – I searched for all relevant scientific literature published up to the present. With regard to the fact that the writer deceased only two decades ago, a lively interest is shown toward Manganelli's oeuvre by numerous researchers. I reviewed the relevant secondary literature in full, still quite few interpretations can be found on the last novel. Although most of the findings in them are contradictory, I also studied and included them in my paper.

3. Findings

Examining the manuscript, it can be stated that the writer **deliberately rejected the intention to tell stories** even in his last novel, *La palude definitiva*-ban (The Definitive Swamp). He minimized story-telling to such an extent that the introduction will be

meaningful. For instance, concerning the origin of the horse, he deleted the name of the person giving the horse to the protagonist. When describing the conditions, Manganelli rather suggests circumstances than describes facts. He indicates that the protagonist could have been an intellectual with similar relationships; he might have visited a large library. Everything seems to be incidental with the exception of the fact that he was forced to run for life. (p. 25)

The persons appearing in the novel are not antropomorphic creatures. The writer informs the reader on these persons; how they act being a part of a crowd, what jobs they pursue, etc, however, no one is distinguished by specifying their individual face or features. The man the protagonist is talking to is hiding his face behind a lamp. **No one has a face (the 'horse-hood' has a cheek), except the swamp whose human face is about to take shape at the end of the novel.**

The interrelation between the game, dream and reality is essential in respect of both the novel and oeuvre. Concerning the relation between the game and reality, it can be stated that the game has no reference to reality; no moral categories are applicable to the game, consequently, it cannot be either immoral or wrong, or it cannot come from the devil, and it cannot be a temptation of the reader. However, in view of the reality, the events of the game can be wrong, immoral or tempting. This point of view is irrelevant, since the world of games is a lie in the aspect of reality, and vice versa; from the angle of the game reality is a lie; consequently, their rules are not interchangeable. **The game is the same as a dream or**

literature; its only aim could be to confuse the reader by taking the reader to an untrue world where the narrative structure is based on untrue rules. (p. 28)

Manganelli's **aim is to reach the truth to be created** in his works by rhetorical means and language system – **the definitive truth of the world** – or at least to approach it to the greatest possible extent. (p. 29) Manganelli's fiction has a specific system without any reference to the external world, which is untrue compared to any other system observed in any other real world, however, it is true within itself; what is really essential is perception in the internal logics of the work.

He was interested in ways of consideration of the world and not in the states of mind; whether the world can be understood and known. It is a **constructive depression at the level of language** – referring back to a former chapter of my dissertation, in which I analysed Neo-Baroque features in Manganelli's fiction and discussed the style – it is the same theme with the writer as he considers to be love with Petrarca and physical suffering with Leopardi. It is **a basic feeling which is manifested at the level of language**. (p. 43)

The writer's usage is featured of the plot told in the present tense. I have referred to the views stating that the present tense is more suitable for the description of feelings and state of mind than the past tense. Manganelli used the present tense not only **to represent psychological dimensions**. He could also have decided for the present tense because he **found zero, nil, nothing, the coordinate system origin and inconceivability of the moment**

exciting in theoretical terms. The present tense is as passing transition between the past and future as zero is between negative and positive numbers or a point on the straight line which forms a part of the line but it has no spatial dimension. (p. 56) Furthermore, another reason could be for the use of present tense by Manganelli is that **there are no events of the past and future in existence from human point of view** if we agree to the idea that the past is a set of our memories from the past time and the events of the future appear to be a set of our expectations based on our observations and experience.

Concerning the logical structure of the text, Angelo remarks that Manganelli fails to answer the questions raised by him. Albeit **the essential feature of the writer's prose is that he has no intention to communicate contents of any kind as a writer or to pretend being better informed than a superficial observer.** He only intends to chat about something that he is not completely aware of. Manganelli develops every argument to the utmost in the novel, naturally, no answers are provided by him to his questions. The text is getting unfolded by flowing of topics and not by conclusions. (p. 60)

It is not easy to imagine the functioning of tragedy without a story in a literary work; however, the tension is created by the initial situation in *La palude definitiva* (The Definitive Swamp). The **tragedy appears due to the fact that the protagonist has been expelled for an offence that he has not committed or he is unaware of.** The novel is about his life following the occurrence of

the tragedy. **The process of developing self-knowledge by the protagonist also gives rise to a number of dramatic moments.** (p. 62) Manganelli created vibration and restlessness by showing that the external world proves to be absolutely unknowable, while other contemporary writers created such atmosphere by irrationality of the known world.

In Manganelli's fiction each word and metaphor are enriched with additional layers of meaning, and they can be interpreted not only in their original meaning but they can refer to both themselves and opposite to them. **Analysis of the text is of prime importance, and the intertextual linkages can be ignored, since according to idea of 'literature as a lie' no other text is relevant than reality; the only truth of the text.** (p. 85)

The details of the story giving rise to the events are insignificant in the work *La palude definitiva* (The Definitive Swamp). The reader does not need to know why the **protagonist** was expelled, what kind offence he had committed in fact, why he should have been executed, and finally, who and why helped him escape. The conditions are important only to such an extent that **he gives up his earlier personality to commence his journey in the swamp.** (p. 90) The 9th card of the Major Arcanum from the Tarot of Marseilles is the Hermit. According to one of the studies the man talking about the swamp is identical with the figure seen on the card. The Hermit is a symbol for decomposition in alchemy, which suggests a double linkage between the symbol system and the symbols of alchemy. However, I did not manage to prove it, since not all the cards of the

Major Arcanum appear in the novel or not in a manner which would allow concluding the complete existence of the protagonist's travel. Consequently, there is no parallel between the knowledge coming to life on the cards and the man's self-knowledge evolving in the swamp. (p. 92) If the old man hiding his face behind the light of the lamp really were the Hermit, the protagonist would still not turn into the Hermit. This is simply an encounter. The card of the Hermit indicates the state in the process of self-knowledge when the protagonist has already set out on his way but he has not commenced the hardest part of the work; no descent to hell has taken place yet, and the man has not faced his own fears or he has not restructured his own world but he has just set off, found out his name and task. This moment might refer to the idea that arrival at the swamp is a kind of mission. For that very reason a comparison with the journey of the hero represented by the Major Arcanum seemed to be a good way to the interpretation, however, if such parallel was true, this would also narrow the further opportunities of the interpretation.

I attempted to carry out the analysis of the novel through its **symbol system**. The **motive of crime** appears at the beginning of the novel, but due to the lack of details it does not come to light whether the protagonist finds himself guilty or not. The only fact that the reader can find out that the man has offended the rules and presumably the gods of his former city for which he is to be put to death. However, his previous life is fading to such an extent in the swamp that he is unable to remember not only the gravity of his offence but also the names of the gods he hurt or what his name was

earlier. The man feels bitter peace, perhaps, because he did not stand for his acts or because he was unable to agree with the charges, so he considers himself to be innocent and the feeling of peace is a kind of compensation for him. (pp. 98-99)

The **concept of time** in the swamp is different from that experienced before; there is no concrete light-source, light and darkness alternate with each other accidentally; there is no usual continuity of night and day moments. When the man needs sleeping, the evening commences and when his vision is over, it gets light so that he can continue to observe the swamp. His biological needs do not comply with the swamp, since sleeping never gives resting, on the contrary, when the man is prepared, the night brings visions which are exhausting and demanding but they help the man get familiarized with the swamp and the role of his own existence in it.

In chapter 8 of the novel the protagonist realizes that the swamp gives shelter for him because his situation is similar to the sound spreading in the space; he is similar to the noise which spreads through the 'horse-hood'¹ in the medium of the swamp. He names himself as an **inaccurate message**. He is featured of confusion and unsettledness. The nature of message suggests that it will be received by the presumptive addressee where there will be a chance to

1 Manganelli, Giorgio: *La palude defintiva*, p. 26: „Tutto intorno a me cambia, e la mia forza sta in questo essere io me stesso e questo oscuro ma potente cavallo che mi conduce, o trasporta o mi piacerebbe dire, mi trasmette, come se io fossi un sentito dire, un rumore, un messaggio impreciso che va consegnato ad esseri idonei a riceverlo.”

understand his own goal and intention. Apart from all these, he declares his own imperfection, which helps him toward self-knowledge. (p. 104)

The **house** in the swamp is like an egg which protects him like a **hull**, in which he can live his dreams, and at the same time it is like a ship holding him on the surface of the swamp wherever it gets. The egg as metaphor also refers to evolution not only to protection, since it is a prerequisite of evolution so that the protagonist will be protected and not forced to fight for survival. Later he outgrows this cosy hull, and his visions take place in the swamp outside the house, however, the **protective nature** of the hull-ship remains unchanged until the end of the novel. Although the swamp is severe, the life of the man is not threatened by anything. (p. 106)

The **labyrinth, garden and theatre** form a triple vision, and they can be identified as various trials. The first task is **to find his way out of the labyrinth**, which is also attained when he realizes that he is only walking around and around. Then **he must find out what the garden is for**, and finally **he must hold his ground in the theatre**. These three tasks or stations following one another resemble three trials of tale heroes. The trial in the tales mostly consists of three stages: the hero must find out where the monster is (it is often indicated by an old dreadful but well-intentioned person or animal, the monster is to be found (often in a labyrinth) and to be killed. **The protagonist finds his tyrant ego in the theatre who is beaten by the ego of the hired killer**. If the tale hero succeeds (success is also a constant pattern unless the trial is

made not by the hero but and elder brother of his or a by another unworthy person), he will get his just deserts for which he undertook the trial. The garden turns into a theatre where dramatic tales are recited. The protagonist suddenly realizes that he is an actor in the story and he encounters himself on the stage. He gets acquainted with various roles and faces of his and gain control over them. This is the third phase in the process of self-knowledge.

At this point the man turns into a collection of monologues. For instance, he **feels love toward an unworthy woman who is identical with the swamp**. This is reinforced by the fact that the word 'swamp' is feminine in the Italian language, and on the other hand, the man reserves his opinion until the end of the novel that the swamp is not a part of the universe. In point of fact, the unworthy woman does not belong to anything either, since she is also a non-existing shadow, "a female nil" (un femminino nulla) and she is not a member of any human community just as the swamp is not a part of the universe. That is why the man remarks that he is unaware of her non-existence.

The two egos of the man clash on the stage after the love scene; **the conflict between the hired killer and tyrant appears in a dialogue full of emotions**. This is a clash of hatred of two different types: the hostility of the tyrant is universal and polished and that of the hired killer has reference only to the tyrant; it is specific, professional and passionate, however, it is comprehensive and patient. He commits murders in a well-planned and deliberate manner. (pp. 110-111)

The aim of the self-knowledge is orientation in the three different fields of the life. **The patience gained on the way in the labyrinth and the approach itself toward the task symbolise everyday orientation**, whose lack would make him unable to find the garden, which is the next station. In this case the garden stands for finding roots – indicated by monumental tombs of his ancestors – as well as idyll and privacy as a scene of dates and walks.

The theatre stands for the faces shown to the external world - the third level of human life - which can be concluded from the sequence of visions. In order to get in the theatre, the man must get to know the garden but it requires walking all over the labyrinth. The man has a chance to create harmony between his roles and faces, thus he is able to control his egos communicated outwards. (pp. 112-113)

The symbol of horse or 'horse-hood' has its roots in Greek mythology. Going back to Plato's theory of ideas makes interpretation evident by the phrase 'cavallinità' ('horse-hood'). **According to Hesiod and Ovid Pegasus is a winged horse grazing on Parnassus and Helicon, in his wake there were springs in which Muses bathed. The horse, which is a symbol of creation, refers not only to work of art or to the technics ("techné") within creation but also to all kinds of intellectual activities which one performs under stimulation by inner drive.** (p. 116)

The man's attitude to creation is also determined by the pieces of dream when he is about to behold the horse. The question

of the 'horse-hood': «Perché sei tanto sciocco?»² can be interpreted as the 'horse-hood' can also understand that such action would make the journey and efforts the man has made so far meaningless, or **beheading the horse would mean giving up knowledge**. The horse diverts the man from his intention by tameness in both cases. This suggests that **beyond creation, accompanying** and leading are also symbolised by the '**horse-hood**'. (p. 117)

The **man writes about losing the physical nature of his own existence**, moreover, his personality also gets disintegrated, and while riding he refers to himself as a zero or nil. The mathematical parallel is absolutely – sounds the same in Italian - analogous to the symbolics of the novel. Zero power of each number is one, "**n⁰=1**" **consequently, the man gets on the horse indicated by nil and the result is 1, i.e. the man becomes a unified personality whose precondition is that he mounted and let the horse take and lead him**. While fleeing, he is a confused person existing in several roles, and during the journey he is formed to become a unified personality. In the operation "n" has an important role, since "n" changes, whereas "0" is means of the change or the operation. In the novel the change of the man is in the centre and the 'knight-hood' is merely a device that can only be used for a single purpose; for self-knowledge and development of unified personality. (p. 119)

I think after visiting the realm of the fire the **swamp can be identified as life and the fire refers to the location of will and**

² „Why are you so dull?” p 103

mind. The aim of the visions the man had in the swamp showed the stages of his emotional development and they only referred to the inner world of the man. The visions on the 'horse-hood' and realm of fire aim at the knowledge of the external world. The swamp stands for everyday life which is perplexed and unclean; the swamp is indifferent toward the truth, it is ignoble but kind. The fire is active and the swamp is passive. The fire is the fever of the swamp and perhaps, its driver as well. (p. 123)

The swamp is the symbol of the entity in which forms and essentials are manifested. The face is also such a form whose aim is to make the swamp more apparent. After catching sight of the face, the swamp will be familiar for the man and the swamp does not seem to have any severe nature and to be a medium where it is impossible to live for the man. Encounter with the face does not take place in the last chapter of the novel; however, it refers to the next step in the knowledge of the nature of life. **Since the face is shown as a schematic child's drawing, the swamp is likely to reveal its features for the man all at once**, and the same could have happened to previous visitors of the swamp. (p. 124)

In the light of my analysis, **the swamp as a metaphor refers to entirety, life or the world.** Its main feature is that everything is embraced and nothing is rejected by the swamp. The realm of fire is a complement to the swamp, i.e. it is a part of its. It is **paradoxical that by using the metaphor of the swamp, Manganelli maps the world from which he carefully rescued his hero at the beginning of the novel, but in another dimension; the**

protagonist repress through his former and forgotten external conflicts in an interiorised manner; this is how he comes to terms with himself and he can come to hear of the realm of fire and existence of the co-regent, thus he can get familiarized with the real nature of the swamp.

The swamp is the place of the four elements and volcano but they are uniform, and all the four elements make up a unity. The volcano is the opposite of existence and the swamp is the existence of non-existence, since the swamp will change when the fire appears and keeps the swamp changing in the dark. If we assume that they are of the same category and include all the four elements both individually and collectively, then they may not refer to anything but to the entire life and to the world in which life takes place. (p. 133)

The analysis of the symbols of alchemy can result in the same conclusion as that of the four elements. The swamp stands for the entirety, world or life in which the protagonist has a chance to develop. In the meantime the man becomes one with the swamp; the swamp would cast out anything that is different from the swamp itself. The **man** is not human any longer as pushing in the swamp; he passes through the changes along with the swamp, thus he loses his human nature, face and name and he forgets the names of people and gods who used to be important for him. As a result he also **turns into substance; he passes through the phase of nigredo**, and then purification or sublimation takes place **in dreams** (labyrinth, garden and theatre). He appears in a number of roles, however he continues

to lack any human feature or gender; he might transform into anything, however he has a steady feature: he represents the swamp in each role and he acts for the swamp or on its behalf. The last dream is about his relation to the 'horse-hood', however, the 'horse-hood' belongs to the swamp likewise the man himself, which makes him incapable of killing the horse.

The phases of alchemy serve the purpose of the transformation of substance to make it full of life so that it will obtain wisdom and human quality. **If the three stages take place in the swamp and in the man, since he has also become a part of the swamp, the swamp assumes human nature before the man, i.e. the true face if the human face of the swamp is presented through the child's drawing.** At the very moment when it happens, **the swamp turns into human and so does the man, since he has also undergone the changes. He has been decomposed, reintegrated and purified.** This is the point where the novel ends; the last phase of alchemy takes place following the encounter with the fire which can be identified as the phase of *rubedo*. (p. 137)

4. Relevant publications / conference papers

27th National Conference of Scientific Students' Associations (OTDK), Section of Humanities, Department of Italian Language and Literature; „... are we on our way toward damnation or principal and perfect clarity?“ – or on the symbol system of the novel entitled *La palude definitiva* (The Definitive Swamp) by Manganelli, 2005.