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At the Margins of Identity:

Human-Animal Relations in the *Parallel Stories* of Péter Nádas

Enikő Darabos

(Sigmund Freud University, AT)

Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of literature and Human-Animal Studies (HAS) through Péter Nádas's novel, *Parallel Stories* [*Párhuzamos történetek*]. It examines how the work challenges traditional notions of identity and otherness, particularly in human-animal relationships. Drawing on HAS's interdisciplinary approach, which critiques anthropocentric perspectives, the study analyses how Nádas's narrative through the Jonesian "performativities of bodies" blurs boundaries between humans and animals. Theoretical frameworks from Jacques Derrida and Donna Haraway inform the analysis, particularly Derrida's concept of "the other" and Haraway's posthumanist thought on human-animal entanglements.

Focusing on Kristóf's encounter with a black dog in Budapest's hidden gay scene at the Margaret Island, the paper provides insight into the secret gay cruising subculture of the time. This relationship highlights shared experiences of marginality and otherness, uniting humans and animals as outsiders in their social contexts.

Nádas's intense focus on corporeal experiences offers a profound meditation on human existence, reconciling conflicting aspects of flesh and spirit, instinct and reason. By examining Nádas's portrayal of raw animality in human nature, the study contributes to literature on posthumanism and animal studies in contemporary fiction.

Through this analysis, the paper demonstrates how literary works can expand our understanding of humanity in relation to the animal world, reinterpreting concepts of identity and otherness. By engaging with HAS and deconstructive theories, the study offers new insights into how narratives like *Parallel Stories* challenge and refine our perceptions of human-animal relationships.

Keywords: Human-animal-studies; identity construction; otherness; gender and LGBTQA+ studies; body in literature.

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"And now the dog was coming after him on the bridge so he would have to continue to live his life for its sake, for a dog."
(Péter Nádas, *Parallel Stories*, 2005)

Introduction

Human-animal studies (HAS) has emerged as a vibrant and rapidly expanding transdisciplinary field since its inception in the 1970s. Born out of the contemporary animal rights movement, HAS have grown to encompass an increasingly diverse array of academic disciplines, each discovering its own unique interface with the study of human-animal relationships (Trevathan-Minnis and Shapiro 2021, 4). Within this broad landscape, the intersection of literature and HAS offers particularly fertile ground for exploring and reimagining our understanding of the complex interactions between humans and other animals.

Literature, with its power to craft narratives and shape perspectives, plays a crucial role in HAS by providing a medium through which we can re-examine and potentially transform our ideas and terms on human-animal relationships. As David Herman argues, "telling different kinds of narratives about humans' relationships with non-human others has the potential to alter understandings of our place" in the broader ecological context (Herman 2018, 4). This transformative potential of literature extends beyond mere representation, delving into the realm of cultural understanding and ontological frameworks. Herman argues that by investigating "the power of narrative" as being able "to reframe the cultural models or ontologies that undergird hierarchical understandings of humans' place in the larger biotic communities" we engage in "research on cultural understanding of animals" (Herman 2018, ix). This reframing process challenges long-held assumptions about human exceptionalism and encourages a more nuanced, empathetic, and interconnected view of our relationship with non-human animals.

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This paper explores the dynamic interplay between literature and Human-Animal Studies (HAS), examining how literary works contribute to and are informed by evolving perspectives on human-animal relationships by reinterpreting the terms of identity and otherness. Through an analysis of Péter Nádas's groundbreaking contemporary Hungarian novel *Parallel Stories* (Nádas 2011; abbreviated as *PS*), I will explore how literature reflects and challenges societal attitudes towards animals, particularly dogs. This investigation will demonstrate how the novel serves as a catalyst for reconceptualizing human animality by focusing on corporeal experiences, human–human interactions, and human–animal relations. In doing so, I will follow the suggestion made by Owain Jones, who argued that "the performativities of bodies in everyday life (human and animal) can be *mobilised as ways of knowing of animal becoming and personhood*" (Jones 2023, 65). This means I will analyse, through the "performativities of bodies" in *Parallel Stories*, how shared experiences of marginality and otherness emerge between human and animal, which often positions them as outsiders in their respective (social) contexts.

Theoretical assumptions: the animal as "the absolute other"

The most recent literature on human–nonhuman relations extends to the point where the "modelling of animal subjectivity" is now a legitimate area of inquiry in the attempt to develop a narratology "beyond the human" (Herman 2018, 203). The discourse, however, can be traced back to Jacques Derrida's reflection on the moment he found himself naked, being observed by his cat. For the remarkable development of Human-Animal Studies (HAS), it is certainly true that, as Derrida stated: "The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins here" (Derrida 2002, 397).

Derrida's seminal work in animal studies, particularly his 1997 address "The Autobiographical Animal", marks a crucial turning point in the philosophical approach to human-animal relationships. Derrida challenges the traditional anthropocentric view that

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has dominated Western philosophy, calling for a fundamental reconsideration of "the philosophical problematic of the animal" (Derrida 2002, 395). Central to his argument is a critique of the reductive notion of 'the animal' as a singular entity, while he engages in an insightful exploration of the concept of heterogeneity, drawing on the semantic fields associated with terms such as "animal", "*mot*" ("word"), "limit", "tropology", and "chimera". He advocates for a deconstructive understanding that acknowledges animal subjectivity by emphasizing the experience of being looked at by an animal, rather than just looking at animals. This shift in perspective challenges the traditional human-centric view and opens up new avenues for exploring interspecies relationships.

Furthermore, Derrida proposes a radical rethinking of language and communication in relation to animals. He suggests moving beyond the notion of "giving speech back" to animals, instead advocating for "acceding to a thinking […] that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, as something other than a privation" (Derrida 2002, 416). This approach challenges the long-held view of language as a uniquely human attribute and encourages a "limitrophic" perspective. Derrida's concept of "limitrophy" involves not erasing the limit between human and animal, but rather complicating and multiplying it, recognizing "a multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits" that exist between various forms of life (Derrida 2002, 415–416). This perspective aligns closely with Donna J. Haraway's work on human-animal relationships, particularly her concept of "natureculture" which, in fact, implies the "joint lives of dogs and people, who are bonded in significant otherness" (Haraway 2003, 16).

Haraway, building on her earlier work in *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), which challenged traditional boundaries between human/animal, organism/machine, and physical/non-physical, further developed these ideas in her *Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (2003). Thematizing the "significant otherness" of the animals, in this later work Haraway introduces the term "natureculture" to emphasize the inseparability of nature and culture, particularly in the context of human-dog relationships. Her concept of

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"natureculture" resonates with Derrida's "limitrophy" by challenging traditional binary oppositions, particularly the human-animal divide, while they emphasize the complexity and multiplicity of relationships between species. Both concepts encourage a reconsideration of how we understand and relate to other species. Haraway's perspective that "[d]ogs are not surrogates for theory; they are here to live with" aligns with Derrida's call for a more nuanced understanding of animal subjectivity (Haraway 2003, 5). This perspective moves beyond viewing animals as mere objects of study or philosophical tools, recognizing them as beings with their own agency.

The concept of animality in the narratives of Nádas resonates with these poststructuralist ideas of otherness, as the author views human existence as part of an uncontrollable, pulsating sensual world that lies in its equanimity throughout his oeuvre, where the condition of identity relies on the acceptance and reflection of the otherness that resides within the self, with animals serving as representations of this 'uncanny' otherness.

Péter Nádas and the *Parallel Stories*

Péter Nádas is a renowned Hungarian writer and photographer who has repeatedly been among the contenders for the Nobel Prize for Literature in recent years. He was born into a Jewish family in Budapest in 1942 and now lives with his wife in a small village called Gombosszeg in Hungary. His 2005 monumental work, *Parallel Stories*, not only offers a scathing critique of various ideologies – including Nazi biopolitics (Görözdi 2018), transgenerational trauma within families, and the aftermath of the Holocaust (Darabos and Tóth 2025; Balint 2018) – but also challenges the linguistic and narrative conventions governing the representation of human corporeality, human-animal relations, and interpersonal dynamics through its carefully crafted and unique form of literary language which positions the novel within European literature (Balint 2018).

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The book offers a kaleidoscopic vision of the twentieth century and is characterized by thematic and linguistic radicality. It is important to highlight the extensive, approximately one-hundred-page sex scene, conveyed through a highly corporeal and vivid language, which, given the typically restrained nature of Hungarian literature, provoked significant critical astonishment (Darabos 2017). *Parallel Stories* is a polyphonic narrative told by multiple narrators, as if the author is metatextually thematizing the role of the narrator by trying to explore as many narrative forms as possible to explore this exciting – and sometimes dissonant – tonality. The stories, which are mostly family histories from the 1930s and 40s or 1960s, are embedded in occasionally dramatic historical circumstances and by no means told chronologically, intertwine, sometimes alternating from chapter to chapter, but later it can also happen in a chapter or even in a single sentence that the reader finds herself in a completely different story from the one she started with. Through this constant but unpredictable alternation, the novel places the reader in a particular state of consciousness, overwhelmed by the experience of the fluidity offered by the narratives.

Parallel Stories opens with a symbolic scene: a crime at the Tiergarten in Berlin during Christmas 1989. A young psychology student discovers a corpse of a man in his fifties and is suddenly haunted by vague self-accusations. This could explain the enigmatic title of the first chapter, "Patricide", though the reader is given no clear answers about the identity of the body or the murderer. The timing is highly symbolic, occurring just after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and can be interpreted in multiple ways. Most obviously, it represents a change in the political system and the beginning of a new era. Existentially, it could symbolize the possibility of freedom, alluding to the fall of an ideologically divided world. Metatextually – a level on which interpretation must always operate with Nádas – it could signify how the trilogy breaks with the narrative tradition of presenting stories told by a limited number of narrators, employing instead constant switches in narrative voices.[1]

[1] Metatextual interpretation is a central task in approaching Nádas's prose because his narratives consistently reflect on the act of narration itself, foregrounding doubts about textuality and embedding complex self-

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Following this overture, the narrative shifts to Budapest in March 1960-61, presenting the bourgeois home and family of the Lippay-Lehrs. This thread which I will analyze on the following pages is counterpointed by Kristóf's first-person account of his ambivalent sensual experiences, portrayed as a teenage search for (sexual) identity in which a black stray dog makes his appearance as a lifesaver during the sensual adventures on the nocturnal Margaret Island in Budapest.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the novel meticulously examines the instrumentalization of destruction by exploring the *Lebensborn* institutes, created by the Nazis to study 'racially pure' Aryan children. This is done through the story of Hans von Wolkenstein, son of Carla von Thum zu Wolkenstein. Carla, a wealthy and successful researcher, works alongside Otmar Freiherr von der Schuer, a Nazi-affiliated geneticist at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics in Berlin-Dahlem in the 1930s. These characters form the main focus of the German narrative strand in the trilogy.

Kristóf's quest for (sexual) identity

Kristóf, a central character in Nádas's novel, embodies a complex intersection of personal trauma, social displacement, and historical context. His background as a self-perceived orphan, with a mother who left with another woman and a father murdered by communist comrades, establishes a foundation of loss and ideological disillusionment. His personal history represents in a smaller scale the broader historical traumas explored in the novel, which thus indicates a fractal structure of Nádas's novel. The character's residence in his

referential structures across his oeuvre. In *Parallel Stories*, the opening scene of the Berlin Wall's fall epitomizes this poetics of self-reflection: the image of the collapsing wall signals a radical shift in novelistic rhetoric and aesthetics, one that breaks with canonical 'fathers' and literary conventions and asserts a newly autonomous narrative voice (Bloom 1995). Such gestures resonate both with long-standing narratological dilemmas in Nádas's work and with Harold Bloom's agonistic model of literary inheritance, making metatextual reading indispensable to understanding the interplay of history, narration, and literary self-definition in his fiction.

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aunt's house, coupled with his inability to fully identify with bourgeois norms despite their formative influence on his identity, creates a tension between internalized social norms and personal alienation. His internal conflict mirrors the larger societal tensions of post-war Hungary, caught between traditional values and emerging ideologies. His story in the novel represents a prismatic narrative technique, as Nádas deliberately shifts between different narrative voices. He creates a complex textual space where the protagonist's perspective alternates between first-person singular and third-person narration, blending free indirect discourse with intricate inner monologues: "The truth is, I had two interrupted lives, he would say later of himself, one proved to be not enough, the other promised to be too much, and in both I felt very much like a stranger" (*PS* 332). This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of psychological depth, where the narrative structure itself becomes an experimental method of revealing the protagonist's inner world. The constant play between narrative perspectives creates a prismatic view of consciousness, challenging the tradition of linear storytelling.

Narrated from a uniquely reflective retrospective perspective, Kristóf's story offers a sensual account of five nights he spent on Margaret Island in Budapest during the spring of 1960 through acquiring "forbidden knowledge, the city's ultimate secret" (*PS* 325). With it Nádas's narrative delves into the raw, wild, and marginalized reality of the homosexual subculture of the nocturnal Margaret Island. Kristóf's episode serves as a pivotal moment in the novel, showcasing its author's intricate exploration of queerness and liminal spaces. Set against the backdrop of socialist Hungary[2], this section of the novel provides a vivid insight into the secret gay cruising subculture of the time.[3] The public park of the Margaret

[2] As for the historical context, it is important to note that Kristóf's story is set in 1960. It was only in 1961 that consensual same-sex relations were decriminalized in the Hungarian Penal Code; however, the state security forces continued to keep homosexuals under surveillance and, when necessary, used their sexual orientation as a means of blackmail (Takács and Tóth 2021).

[3] David Timothy Aveline describes cruising as "activities geared toward the search for and negotiation of sex with a stranger. This is not only a 'hunt' for a sex partner, but also the attempt to get this partner to agree to sex" (Aveline 1995, 202).

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Island situated "between the two huge arms" (*PS* 332) of the Danube River, becomes a symbolic heterotopia – a space where societal norms are suspended and desires can be expressed if one is aware of the valid sexual semiotic of bodily (gestures, poses, etc.) and vocal (whistles, call-outs, invocations, etc.) signifiers.

Kristóf's journey on Margaret Island situates his self-discovery at a semiotic level inasmuch he explores the gay semiotics behind the bodies, movements and gestures of these anonymous nocturnal actors. His wanderings among these wild naked men, these "formidable tribal warriors" (*PS* 325) serve as a metaphor for his navigation of the homosexual subculture, which is presented as both primal and highly codified. This duality is evident in Kristóf's oscillation between experiencing moments of sudden enlightenment and recognizing the undiminished theatrical, that is, fictitious nature of the situation where for these men "nothing was sacred; the whole world was but a parody of itself, designed solely for their amusement" (*PS* 328). His approach to this "insane game" (*PS* 326) is framed in terms of a semiotic interpretation. He literally reads the gay cruising fiction unfolding before him, treating the nocturnal encounters as a text to be deciphered: "They built their secret language with different dialects of their shared imagination […] It was like a foreign language I'd never heard before yet understood from the first syllable, with all its phrases and expressions" (*PS* 364). The bodies themselves become signifiers in a secret language of theatricalized sensuality, with their interactions forming a grammar and rhetoric that Kristóf must learn to navigate.

The wild sensual rhythm of this nocturnal cruising adventure causes Kristóf to become lost, not only literally and geographically in the dark spatiality of the island, but also mentally and psychologically in the labyrinth of intentions that are inevitably instantaneous in each of his movements and those of his sometimes invisible cruising partners. Kristóf wavered between his curiosity for an irreversible corporeal initiation with these men and his fear of self-disruption, torn between the desire to participate and the urge to merely observe their sensuality, his indecision reflecting the novel's exploration of sexual confusion

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and the fragility of identity. In the nocturnal landscape of Margaret Island, Kristóf's erotic curiosity led him to fixate on an idealized figure he called "the giant", who embodied the freedom of this transgressive homosexual theater mixed with elements of tragicomedy. This figure generates a complex interplay of desire, fear, and self-doubt that Kristóf experienced during his cruising adventure:

> What could this man be, I didn't know. One could guess the enormous configuration of his loins through his overalls; his powerful ass protruded abruptly. He had thick, dense eyebrows that met above his nose, his nose was short and strong, and on his jutting cheekbones the dark brown skin was so taut it seemed bluish. A navvy – this old-fashioned obsolescent word came to mind for him, the weight of dirt and its autumnal wet fragrance. Or perhaps a carpenter, a stonecutter, a cutter of wood or stone or something that must be grasped by hand. I couldn't take my eyes off his head, his limbs, his face, his jaws, while we walked around or pursued each other on the trails. I could not forget, either, his suddenly flashing, suddenly vanishing smile. […] I can't imagine what I wanted from the giant; he too probably had a disgusting life (*PS* 361-369).

He will be the main actor in Kristóf's sensual fulfillment, which will ultimately be carried out in the public urinal on Margaret Island by "these two", namely "the giant with his mustached assistant" (*PS* 369), for the enjoyment of several male witnesses. Although Kristóf fled from the destructive power of the sensual pleasure these men can gave him, he desired the experience just as strongly and it served as the point of culmination of his one-week cruising.

Human-animal relations in two acquaintances

In the narratives of Péter Nádas, animality functions both as an element of the sensual dimension of human existence and as a symbol of transcendental significance, frequently confronted with rich traditions of Christian symbolism. For instance, in his short story "Lamb" (1968), Nádas situates the figure of the lamb at the intersection of the profane – exemplified by the mundane reality of lamb stew – and the sacred, understood through its traditional role as an emblem of purity and sacrifice within Jewish-Christian theology. This

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tension between the mundane and the sacred allows the lamb to serve as a powerful metaphor for pervasive racism in human society. Similarly, in *A Book of Memories* (1986), the hermaphroditic nature of the snail emerges as a central motif that shapes the philosophical architecture of the narrative (Darabos 2020a, 2020b, 2021). In *Parallel Stories*, a huge black stray dog, a Hungarian vizsla, appears as Kristóf's night companion and lifesaver during his cruising adventures at the liminal which are pursued in order to reveal his identity and the structure of human desire.

The dog's first appearance is linked to Kristóf's previously mentioned flight, as he tumbles over the iron fence of the Grand Hotel on Margaret Island, half-blind with fear and sensual excitement beneath the dark trees. Awakening from his sudden faint, Kristóf gradually becomes aware that something is approaching him: "judging by the sounds, it had to be a monster. No human could make such noises" (*PS* 391). The dog is large, black, and smells as if it has eaten "human shit" before (*PS* 394), and it licks the face of the man lying on the ground with relish. Kristóf's initial reaction to the animal is one of choking up: "When animals get too close to him he begins to choke up; he doesn't know why. The roof of his mouth begins to blister, he retches, and he has to pull himself away from the animal. He cannot share anything with them, not even with a lizard or a porcupine" (*PS* 961).

Despite this physical aversion, he reflects inwardly that he feels safe with animals: "Perhaps I felt secure with animals precisely because I could never lower myself to their level" (*PS* 394). Although the original Hungarian text uses the structure *nem közösködhettem velük* (perhaps best translated as "I could not commune with them"), which primarily refers to the lack of common understanding between humans and animals, making conventional communication impossible, the sense of feeling safe with animals can be understood as a bridging sentiment that navigates the gap between this impossible verbal communication and the necessity of a sensual approach.

Encountering the black "monster" amidst the nocturnal landscape of his desires, however, Kristóf experiences a profound sense of otherness, where the boundaries between

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human and animal blur. The dog evokes a visceral reaction, as Kristóf grapples with his "beastly self" (*PS* 331), suggesting a duality within him that resonates with his sexual confusion and existential turmoil. The phrase underscores Kristóf's perception of himself and others in this liminal space, where he is both predator and prey in a field which falls out from the realm of morality. The dog is seen to be also the "Satan's dog" (*PS* 393). Naming him so, the stray dog becomes a symbol of his journey into this dark terrain, representing both companionship in his isolation and a reminder of the monstrous aspects of his own nature.

His second thought is that "the black-haired giant had turned into a monster" (*PS* 391), and thus, through these metonymic chains, the reader can observe Kristóf's attempts to willingly identify with otherness, as well as his efforts to find even the most radical possibilities of rejecting them. In this unfolding narrative, the black stray dog becomes his alter ego – the shadowy, nocturnal side of himself that is desperate for fulfillment.

In his firm decision not to develop any binding sentiments, he wants to get rid of the dog who is trying to be his companion. He remembers his childhood autumns when he and his family moved into the Grand Hotel on Margaret Island while the servants cleaned their bourgeois house in the city (*PS* 395–401). In his existential detachment, he just wants to be left alone to kill himself by jumping from Margaret Bridge on his way home. That's why he takes the dog to the back entrance of the hotel, where the kitchen staff carefully sorts the leftovers and locks him in the garbage bay.

After being diverted from his initial intent of killing himself, Kristóf finds himself in a public urinal together with quite a number of unknown and unidentifiable men. This will be the venue of Kristóf's sensual initiation performed by "those two" (*PS* 964) desired figures, whom he had tried to avoid and after whom he was longing during his whole cruising adventure. After the two men have publicly initiated him into the realm of anonymous satisfaction, they leave him on the floor, covered in human urine and sperm, as a police squad interrupts the nocturnal rite of raw male pleasure. Chaos erupts during the

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police riot as the "somber Roman warriors" of masculine desire (*PS* 407) attempt to vanish into the sudden turmoil, shouting and crying. The police use excessive force to violently put an end to this hidden gathering of these homosexual outlaws (Takács and Tóth 2021, 277–280), while Kristóf finds a way to escape through the open door of the public urinal, ultimately seeking a path to end his own life.

He decided to take a detour to avoid running into the police again and chose to go home via the Árpád Bridge: "He picked this escape route because the surest way of throwing himself successfully into the depths would be from the Árpád Bridge" (*PS* 622). Feeling dirty and humiliated, he resolved to throw himself over the railing in the middle of the bridge, seeking to end his life, which he felt was burdened by the conflicting antagonisms of identification and denial: "His black shirt and black pants, wet with other men's urine and filthy with their sperm, stuck to his back, chest, bottom, and thighs; they clung to him, adhered to him like skin, white-hot with shame" (*PS* 624). It was then that the black stray dog, which had managed to escape from the hotel's garbage bay, reappeared at Árpád Bridge:

> And the black dog on the bridge attacked Kristóf, knocking him against the railing and licking his face again with its huge tongue. The young man instinctively shoved the dog away; the touch of the strange beast inflamed his mouth, but his move came too late. His palate turned blistery, he thought he'd choke to death on the spot, but the dog thought that now they could begin to play. It was snarling at him in happiness (*PS* 659).

This description forms part of Kristóf's retrospective recollection of that night's events during his wanderings with Klára, a young woman unhappily married, who who perceives Kristóf as her soulmate following their conversations. Thus, Kristóf's recollection is deliberately selective; he withholds aspects of those nights – his homosexual explorations and his frantic attempts to escape – while foregrounding his relationship with the stray dog, which ultimately compels him to continue his life:

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> he could not chase it away. The dog simply wouldn't acknowledge that it was being chased away. It was happy, it wagged its tail and barked hideously. Throw it over the railing, kill it – he really couldn't think of anything else. It would have fit between the uprights of the railing, he could have shoved it through, but the dog thought he wanted to play (*PS* 961).

In the English translation, the tension is particularly palpable in the description of the dog, as the text uses the pronoun 'it', reserved for inanimate objects, to refer to the dog, while at the same time reflecting on the dog's emotions and consciousness.

In the Hungarian original, this effect is far less tense, since the grammatical structures do not compel the speaker to use a pronoun reserved for non-personal referents; thus, without any linguistic tension, the dog „egyszerűen nem vette tudomásul, hogy el van zavarva. Boldog volt" (Nádas 2005, 505).

The tension, however, in the Hungarian original and in Kristóf's mind, is an ethical one – how could a living person kill another living being? The linguistic solutions cited earlier make it indisputable that this black stray dog is seen by him as just as conscious and emotional as himself. His ethical dilemma arises precisely from this fact: he identifies with the dog, he wants to kill himself, so why shouldn't he be able to kill this other being, which could be interpreted as a metaphor for his "nocturnal self" (*PS* 330)? Liberation and destruction thus form an irreconcilable conflict in these relationships, which is only slightly loosened by the regret Kristóf feels in his moment of retrospection when he couldn't tell how much he regrets having chased away his nightly savior:

> The dog would not let go of him, it kept barking, jumping, snapping at his hands, in the end they were rolling on the pavement. The dog was literally writhing with joy because finally they were playing together. But he had to get away from it […] He lifted the dog by its forelegs, it wasn't easy, its large body was heavy, but he managed somehow to gather it up and raise it over the railing to hurl it down. The dog didn't know what was happening but looked down and saw the drop. Although it sounds improbable, the dog seemed to understand that this was no game but that someone was after its life, and it jumped out of his arms […] With its hind legs it succeeded in clearing itself of the railing. Pushing me away and whimpering. It stumbled across the sidewalk, I flopped down and it ran away with its tail between its legs. It fled back to safety on the island, whimpering the whole time (*PS* 962).

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The story of the black stray dog he tells to Klára ends with a strange silence: "And he did not tell her how sorry he had been ever since that he had chased away the dog, and how sorry he felt for himself for having to live" (*PS* 962).

In Nádas's novel, the bond between dog and human acquires an intensely emotional resonance. Kristóf encounters the black dog at a moment when he is attempting to delineate the contours of his own hybrid identity. For him, the dog represents both a source of threat and, through its attachment, a form of salvation – at least with regard to his sudden death wish, stirred by the sensual experiences he encounters within the homosexual subculture, and his inclination to enact it.

The dog's story unfolds across several pages and chapters in a fragmented manner: the narration shifts between the first-person voice of Kristóf and a third-person narrator who occasionally assumes control of the narrative thread. The retrospective rendering of events also allows for their subjective evaluation – thus giving voice to Kristóf's regret over the loss of the dog, his inability to accept, to embrace the devotion that emanated from the stray dog towards him. Yet their relationship reflects, above all, his relationship to himself, his own (in)capacity for self-reflection. Whatever he may regret, he cannot admit it to himself, as his upbringing and family background loom over him with overwhelming negativity. It is this inner struggle that is encapsulated in the storyline associated with Kristóf's character.

Conclusion

The human-animal relationship depicted by Péter Nádas in *Parallel Stories* is marked by conflicted identifications and anxious rejections, offering nuanced insights into the representation of animality within literature. However, Human-Animal Studies (HAS) has only recently begun to establish itself within Hungarian literary studies and remains a relatively emerging field. Contemporary Hungarian scholarship increasingly engages with animality and human-animal relations in Péter Nádas's narratives (Selyem 2015).

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This paper has elaborated on how the novel's narrative follows one of the protagonists, Kristóf, who struggles with a profound desire for self-destruction amid the pursuit of sensual pleasure in a forbidden homosexual subculture, yet finds an ambiguous spiritual companion in an abandoned black stray dog. His troubled psyche, however, inhibits full acceptance or surrender to this bond, reflecting the fragile and often contradictory nature of human-animal connections.

I focused on the linguistic and analytical rigor blended with a refined emotional sensibility in representing the intricate dynamics between Kristóf and the dog. Their relationship is part of a broader portrayal of Kristóf's identity crisis, conveyed not only through fragmented narration but also through a sophisticated narratological structure. Kristóf's story unfolds as a cross-chapter narrative – various threads intertwining, echoing, and sometimes counterpointing each other – which reflects not only the complexity of identity formation but also carries metatextual significance. This narrative complexity mirrors the liminal and unstable boundaries of Kristóf's selfhood, while also revealing how Nádas's "multilayered" textuality operates (Túry 2016, 345).

With my interpretation, I aimed to emphasize a critical literary innovation in Nádas's work: a narratological possibility whereby an animal is granted cognition and emotional depth, through which, as Jones suggests, "we can come to know animal becoming and personhood" (Jones 2023, 70). The black dog becomes a metaphor for animality in the novel, understood in the sense that Nádas's monumental work challenges human exceptionalism by placing the animal and human on the same level of sensuality and reversing the criteria governing agency. Through his descriptions, characters, and carefully crafted paragraph-structures, Nádas challenges mainstream anthropocentric perspectives, inviting readers to reconsider the ethical and existential dimensions of animality as central to understanding identity and otherness.

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MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Bio-bibliographical note

Enikő Darabos, formerly associate professor at Eötvös Loránd University, habilitated in cultural and literary studies (Hungary, 2021). She earned her PhD in deconstructive and psychoanalytical theories at the University of Szeged (Hungary, 2005). She is the author, most recently, of *Testmetaforák a kortárs magyar irodalomban* [Body Metaphors in the Contemporary Hungarian Literature] (Lector, Romania, 2017). Her primary area of research has centered on questions of body representations in literature, corporeal narratology and body theories. Currently she works at the Sigmund Freud Private University (Vienna, SFU).

Email address: enikoe.darabos@sfu.ac.at

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