

THE *AGON* OF IRONY AND SATIRE IN GYÖRGY VITÉZ'S *MISSA AGNOSTICA*

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I begin with examples:

„Ne grimaszolj angyali doktor úr szakmai apologéta!"
[Don't make faces angelic doctor professional apologist!]
„Hallod-e tarzusi nyavalyatörős?"
[You hear that, epileptic from Tarsus?]
„Oh Celanói Kámzsás Tamás mit tanácsolsz?"
[Oh Cowledup Thomas of Celano what d'you recommend?]
„Történéz úr: hol volt az udvari bolond helye a Miasszonyunk templomában?"
[Sir Art Historian: where stood the court jester in the Church of Our Lady?]
„Tejóságos Nagyúrsten nem unod még?"
[My Lord God haven't you had enough yet?]

And a few more:

„T. Gy. tanár úr (szóselehetrólafiam / semmimóka!)"
[Professor Gy. T. (outofthequeslionmyboy / nofoolingaround!)]
„ön holnap bevonul az áldottak seregébe"
[Tomorrow you will report to the army of the blessed]
„(Nem tudod tezsív, - Krisztus magyar vót!
Magyar bárány biza! Nagy nemzetiszín masni a nyakában -)"
[Hey brother, dont ya know Christ was Hungarian
Yessiree a Hungarian lamb! With a big tricolor bow on his neck -].

Missa agnostica is a text full of voices. Predominant among them, of course, is the voice of the narrator, speaking out of the poem, apostrophizing and addressing a great number of figures dead and alive, imaginary and real, using a variant of the *parabasis* of the old [Greek] comedy where the tight inward structure of the play is interrupted, its own limits transgressed, and the chorus turns directly to the audience in the name of the poet. The limits in Vitéz's poem, as in a play or happening inviting audience participation, are transgressed also from the outside; hence the inclusion of voices spoken by others,

some addressing the narrator, others commenting on some utterance, others just heckling or shouting cat-calls. Poetry is not heard; it is overheard, wrote John Stuart Mill. Mill appears not only to have had an inkling of the dialogic nature of poetry, but also voiding proleptically the charge of monologism and univocity laid against it by Bakhtin. The chorus in *Missa agnostica* is mostly replaced by the narrator who is dialogical within his own discourse, at times assuming the postmodern/old comic persona of the *ieron*, the crafty dissembler, the trickster, drawing in and playing off against one another the heterogeneous voices heard and overheard, including the voice of his own double. The crisscrossing plurality of voices, the transgression of fictive boundary lines from either side creates a multilingual auditorium, or more correctly, a cathedral with the *ieron* celebrating a *grey*, not a black, mass, in which *eironeia*, in Latin the *irónia* of a coexistence-in-poliphony, will be dominant if not endemic. (It will have some bearing on what follows that in 1797 Friedrich Schlegel gave a definition of irony as "a permanent parabasis," a nonstop series of intrusions in ever shifting juxtapositions.)

Missa agnostica, of course, is no auditorium, and a cathedral only in the realm of the imagination. It is first and foremost *writing*, the conglomeration of voices a series of allusions, quotations, paraphrases cited and recited, transgressing its porous discursive frontiers. What kind of writing is it, though? Since it literally includes within its frontiers the Latin mass, it is in a sense a commentary; but precisely because the Latin text becomes, as set in the midst of other writings, just another text, the customary relation between primary and secondary text is annulled. *Missa agnostica* appears to be generically unclassifiable; if this is the case, and as one critic put it, genre is "a family of texts," *Missa agnostica* is a literary orphan. Can such an orphan be defined as permanent parabasis, in other words, does its irony truly constitute a sovereign *mode*? And if so, how can the poem be situated in the literary tradition from which it inescapably springs?

The following conjectures will throw light on some of these problems, and leave others in darkness. In the group of poets who succeeded in producing significant work after leaving Hungary in the wake of the crushed revolution of 1956, sometimes labelled "the generation of 56," György Vitéz is unique in that his work from the middle seventies onwards has become a composite field of voices/texts. However, in creating an endlessly oscillating poliphony of independent fragments, he has also introduced thematic/ideological elements that flow counter to unrestricted linguistic flux. Thus, on the one hand, Vitéz's experimentation with language and form has proliferated to such an extent that these later texts bear little or no resemblance to some of his earlier verse, and no resemblance whatsoever to any of the strands of modern Hungarian

poetry, be it that of Füst, Babits, Kassák, Attila József, Weöres, Pilinszky, or Juhász. In making word play, free association, and intertextual juxtapositions the main building blocks of his poems, Vitéz appears to have escaped not only the formal models of his precursors, but through the irony of his puns and allusions he has eliminated the moral earnestness and seriousness that has been obligatory in Hungarian poetry since the romantic period. On the other hand, in becoming conscious of his distance from the tradition of seriousness that still today demands that the poet assume the role of national spokesman - to show the way to the Promised Land, as Petőfi had prescribed - Vitéz's avant-garde pieces are often made to serve as vehicles of scathing criticism directed both at an outmoded poetic attitude and at the backwardness of the culture that fosters it. *Missa agnostica*, written between 1974 and 1976, published as a single volume in 1979, exhibits all aspects of this duality in its being just such a composite of random freeplay *and* a critique of Christianity in general as well as a particular attack on the most sacrosanct and stubborn streak in Hungarian cultural life, what the poem calls "the Christian Hungarian military theology" (18).¹

Is Bakhtin right, then? Is ironic poliphony and dialogism in *Missa agnostica* a front, as it were, for monologic control characteristic of all poetry? Does critique *ab ovo* reduce freeplay to gravity? Or conversely, does linguistic freeplay render criticism ineffective, especially in our literature where the comic mode has always been sharply separated from the serious treatment of serious subjects? It could be argued that the gadfly is, after all, a traditional persona in Hungarian poetry, whose barrage of invective would only be weakened by linguistic play; or, that behind the disjointed verbal surface of Vitéz's neo-dadaist punning there lurks a conventional moralist whose diatribes sound very much like those of his predecessors he is supposed to have discarded; that far from escaping his precursors, Vitéz's closest relative would be Ady (echoed, incidentally, a number of times in the *Missa*) who directed his attacks on nearly the same seats of mendacity, posturing, hypocrisy, ossified self-delusion, and Asian provincialism as did Vitéz, except that unlike Vitéz, Ady always knew how and when to put a stop to his parabases; his invective had always managed to unscramble and rechannel his ironies. Ady knew (no agnostic, he) the law of genre: the prophetic or vatic stance demands undiluted seriousness. Verbal play is acceptable only when the writer has dispensed with the intention of saying something of importance or of saying anything at all. (When content has been given the day off - to cite Tibor Papp.)

So would go conventional interpretive wisdom, not only that of László Németh - no negligible straw man even in today's Hungarian literary criticism - but also of Matthew Arnold, or even Horace and Aristotle. Would

pre/poststructuralist non-wisdom, with a wary eye on umbrellas and sewing machines, or with an ear attuned to the ripple of ironic counterpoint, fare any differently? To reiterate, *Missa agnostica* is a new kind of writing - text - in Derrida's words, "a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself"² overrunning all traditional boundaries, which would then make irrelevant any search for meaning through authorial intention, unities, genres, parts, and their "appropriate" diction. In a free-flowing dialogic text meaning is produced at the intersection or collision of intertexts, at the very seam where parabases and quotations intrude. It is here that irony is released, not the traditional trope of saying one thing and meaning another, but something more like Schlegel's "irony of ironies" or Baudelaire's "*folie lucide*"³ where all historical traces become text and thus relativized, and the e/ron's double nature shows its split into an empirical (naive) "self and his textual (knowing) "self." The self-knowledge of this "self is that of *docta ignorantia*, or agnostic *gnosis*; and there is no escape from the vertigo of this "redoubling" (Baudelaire's phrase) of human fallenness and contingency. Now in *Missa agnostica*, however, onto a scene of what looks like playful nihilism or nihilistic play of the ironist intrudes the voice or textual representation of the *saeva indignatio* lacerating the heart of Vitéz, the sensitive observer of suffering and injustice, driving into the polyphony of ironic *dédoublement* a univocal force that would tend to reorganize the random fragments much like a magnet does a heap of iron filings. This force is satire; and the satirist, as we know from Horace and Juvenal to Swift and beyond, differs, among other things, from the ironist in that he seeks to escape the aporia of the latter's predicament (the state of *agnosis* in the "prisonhouse of language") by appealing to some ethical or other metaphysical ground that transcends language. It is this ground, or metanarrative, that is supposed to authorize the assault on human viciousness and depravity; from this point on, the play is *not* the thing at all.

Vitéz appears to be no exception; in *Missa agnostica* he delivers his salvos at the perceived anomalies of institutional Christianity and Hungarian nationalism from the standpoint of virtue, the path of right conduct, ultimately finding legitimation in the charity of Jesus. Yet it is my view that while the satire of the *Missa* is real enough, the ironies of its intertextual play in the end overwhelm and absorb it. The process of absorption, however, will not leave the assemblage of ironies in the poem unaffected. It will be my main concern in what follows to examine the *agon* between groundless irony and metaphysically grounded satire, in which Vitéz's critique of theology and politics is both implicated and transformed.

The text-originating intertext in *Missa agnostica* (*hypotexte* or *architexte*, in Genette's terms) is, of course, the Tridentine ordinary mass, or rather its parts

traditionally set to music by composers (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei), to which Vitéz has added the Introitus and the *Ite missa est*. In each part he quotes the full Latin text, provides a translation, and with the aid of free association, the primary intertext sets off random series of other intertexts as well as bits of personal reminiscences, allusions to family and world history, on occasion supplemented by such literary devices as sharply focussed images, sonnets, lists, catalogues, and musical forms adapted to poetry. The over-all effect of heterogeneous textual matter appended to the Latin mass is not unlike that of Duchamp's moustachioed Mona Lisa. Like "L.H.O.O.Q." Vitéz's profane exegesis literally defaces the sacred original by aestheticising it: the Latin mass is treated as just another language game, as a human invention serving particular social and historical needs, devoid of transcendental appeal or authority. This analogy is only partly accurate, for the satirist is not a prankster, or if so, he is a prankster with a purpose. The disfigured mass is still a kind of mass, as the oxymoronic title indicates. There may also be other, less obvious factors at play. Just as underneath the moustache there remains an image of Leonardo's masterpiece, the target of Duchamp's ridicule (but also that of his envy and desire), so in the commentary of Vitéz's *Missa*, ostensibly governed by the linguistic freeplay of a positive grammatology, there remains a theodicy, albeit a negative one.

This tension would ultimately make the *Missa* a deconstructive/satirical re-enactment of the catholic mass by an agnostic who yearns for the certainty of *gnosis*. (The assigning of the term "deconstruction" to the *Missa* as a whole is made advisedly, using it in its strictest sense as a writing-specific critique of metaphysical systems working from within those systems. As Derrida has put it, "The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures." Remaining on, and working from, the inside, however, has its drawbacks. Derrida is aware of this when he writes, "Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure ... the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work" [24].) Because it is both disfigurement and satire, *Missa agnostica* of necessity "operates from the inside," from within the structures of the mass and Christianity, and of the Hungarian language. As grammatologist, in his exegesis Vitéz re-reads, de- and re-constructs, disrupts, scrambles, and de-centers the mass through deformation (and defamation) of language, yet language remains for him, as it were, the last refuge: "az ének véd; éltet a jóslat; a betű őrt áll" [the song protects; the prophecy giveth life; the letter stands on guard] (20). Some five years before embarking on *Missa agnostica*,

Vitéz had summarized his ethics in the exemplary *Politikai vers* [Political Poem] in the line: "A tisztesség útjáról nem lehet letérni" [One cannot turn off the road of virtue {honor, decency, righteousness}].

With all the de/reconstrive play going on simultaneously, the narrative in the Introitus remains on the whole ironic, mixed at times with pathos, relating how the speaker's entrance to the altar of God is blocked by the church's institutional trappings; and the Kyrie, aside from an increase in parabases and prosopopeia, is taken up by a chorus of women and a fugue. In both parts the narrator depicts himself as one caught in a painful predicament: in an allusion to Jesus's driving the money changers and traders from the temple, he pleads, "Ne zavarj el színed elől Uram, / nem vagyok galambok árusa; én repdesek a kalickában" [10] [Do not drive me from thy sight o Lord, I'm no dealer in pigeons; it's me fluttering inside the cage]; and he validates his poetic undertaking by the admission, "dalolok mert sikoltanék különben" [15] [I sing or else I'd scream].

Irony is invaded by satire in the Gloria, the part on which most of my reading will focus. The first thirty or so lines run as follows:

- 1 *Gloria in excelsis Deo*
 A sárkányt leszúrták a táboritákat
 kardélre hányták, a mórokkal, -
 (súgjál hamar mi történt a mórokkal Saragossában)
- 5 mi történt a zsidókkal Yorkban, Frankfurtban
 máglyánpirított Szervél Mihállyal Genfben
 Leydeni Jánossal Münsterben (és mit tett Leydeni János
 Münsterrel ugyancsak a Nagyúristen dicsőségére).
 Nincs olyan kitaposott hitványság, mézszárlás, csirkefogás
- 10 lelki herélték, agyalágyak, vérszőlőtáposó lúdtalpasok
 diszkrét belső Grand-Guignol színpada, a központi idegrendszer
 méregfacsarta antinómiás anatómiája
 amit nem az Isten-Prokrusztesz dicsőségére szabna valaki.
 Alig volt olyan iszonyat, békalencsés, kidülledt szemű gyalázat
- 15 embermészárló masina, kés, szurony, kukoricagránát
 gépágyú nehéztank zuhanóbombázó
 amit Úr szolgálja meg nem áldott volna
- (In hoc signo vinces
 Itt írd alá Vince!)
- 20 (Ne grimaszolj angyali doktor úr szakmai apologetá!)
 Tíz éves voltam! a nagy kacsauzstató előtt
 fölállt a zászlóalj. Páncéljárművek, teherautók, motorbiciklik
 német uraságoktól levetett fegyverek. Jött ám a páter
 (igazi csatapap sutgotga anyám meghatottan
- 25 golyózáporban adja föl az utolsó kenetet!)
 Meg is áldott minden löveget, golyószórót, közbakát, őrmestert

30 fekele csövek álián remegtek a szenteltvíz csöppjei
 lobogott a márvászászló (tudhattam volna hogy a Szűzanya
 különösen a magyar nehézpuskát kedveli, az isteni kiseded pedig
 elsősorban a gránátrobbanásoknak örül).

(Nincs is szebb ám a keresztény magyar katonai teológiánál.)
 [17-18]

[Gloria in excelsis deo

The dragon was slain, the Taborites
 were put to the sword, the Moors
 (help me quick what happened to the Moors at Saragosa)
 what happened to the Jews in York, Frankfurt
 to Michael Servetus roasted alive in Geneva
 to John of Leyden in Münster (and what did John of Leyden do
 with Münster likewise for the greater glory of God).
 There is no worn-out wickedness, massacre, trickery
 no discreet inner Grand-Guignol stage of mental eunuchs, morons, flatfoots,
 no poison-squeezed antinómiaán anatomy of the central nervous system
 that somebody would not cut to the glory of God-Procrustes.
 There have hardly been horrors, bug-eyed degradation
 contraptions for human slaughter, knives, bayonets, hand-grenades
 machine guns, heavy tanks, dive bombers
 that would not receive the blessing of a servant of the Lord

(In hoc signo vinces

You sign right here Vincent!)

(Don't you make faces angehe doctor professional apologist!)

I was ten years old! the batallion lined up
 before the big duck pond. Armored vehicles, trucks, motorcycles
 weapons discarded by German overlords. Then came the padre
 (a real battle priest whispered my mother deeply moved
 he gives the last rites in a hail of bullets!)

Sure enough he blessed every cannon, machine gun, private, sergeant
 on chins of black gun barrels trembled drops of holy water
 the Flag of Mary blew in the wind. (I should have known that the Virgin Mother
 especially favors Hungarian heavy guns, while the Holy Infant
 primarily gets pleasure from the blast of grenades).
 (There is nothing finer than the Christian Hungarian military theology.)]

Immediately juxtaposed to "Glory to God in the highest" comes the jumbled list of events (lines 2-8), the first component of the intertextual cluster, for which the quasi-dramatic frame is what looks like an imaginary history class. Layered within the voice of the ill-prepared student who mixes myth and fact (St. George's slaying of the dragon is the first thing that comes to his mind! George = György [Vitéz] "warrior/hero," would-be slayer of the dragons of imposture and sanctimony?), asking for help from an imaginary classmate, there is the questioning voice that distills the essence from all the atrocities committed by both Catholics and Protestants. (The bad student may

also typify obtuseness and compacency regarding the discrepancies within religion and conceivably include the *hypocrite lecteur*, as if to warn: *de te fabula narratur.*) The specific examples, taken mainly from the 16th century (age of reformation, counter-reformation, religious wars, conversions and reconversions) serve to illustrate the general "history lesson" announced by the "teacher" suddenly coming to center stage. It is the voice of the satirist reducing complex issues to a single judgment; the tone is properly stern and apodictic, the diatribes full of scorn and (ultimately) righteous indignation. The Anabaptists are singled out because they were the first victims of both Catholic and Protestant persecution (in Zurich, with Zwingli's consent, they were put to death by drowning in 1525),⁴ yet only seven years later, after capturing the city of Münster and establishing a brief "heaven on earth," they in turn butchered their enemies. (Vitéz's comment in the Kyrie on this vicious circle is apposite: "ülni nem tud a püfölt ember / (de ölni!)" [12] [the flogged man can't sit still / but can he kill!]). Similarly, the Spanish physician-turned-reformer Servetus (author of the *Restitution of Christianity*, a book that drove Calvin to near apoplexy) was burned at the stake in Geneva after Calvin had denounced him to the secular authorities as a heretic. Servetus had gone beyond most reformers by denying the holy trinity, calling it a "three-headed Cerberus"⁵ which Vitéz echoes in the Credo by citing a certain Canon F. who "in a state of inebriation" had called the Holy Ghost "trousers with three legs" [32]. Servetus reappears shortly thereafter when Vitéz comments on one of the Credo's murkier passages about the holy spirit "*qui expatre filioque procedit*" [32] which was singled out by Servetus as having no scriptural foundation (similarly to Erasmus's proof that the *Comma Johanneum* had been injected into the First Epistle of John after Nicea).⁶

Vitéz's intertextual ironies operate by juxtaposing and overlapping historical data, leaving them in unresolved tension; it is their *content*, the hair-splitting dogmatism coupled with unspeakable cruelties that arouses the satirist's anger, which lies at the core of the diatribes (lines 9-13 and 14-17). In accounting for the horrors of intolerance and fanaticism, Vitéz is no sentimentalist à la Rousseau; he appears closer to Swift's Christian conservatism according to which the human being is not a sovereign *animal rationale*, but an *animal rationis capax*, i.e., an animal only *capable* of reason. Human nature is corrupt and so is reason; it can only fulfill its capacity by relying on divine guidance. The exercise of reason alone is tantamount to pride, the object of Swift's most vicious rebuke (cf. end of Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*). Inferring from the allusions in the diatribes, Vitéz would only go so far as to imply that evil is not metaphysical in origin, the result of some mysterious sin of disobedience but the outcome of the contradictions in the human

nervous system that are equally inscrutable. (The play on "antinómíán" telescopes the three meanings of "contradictory," "saved by faith alone," and "anti-law"). But then why the anger and rage, one may ask, coming from a poet who is also a practising psychologist, if what we are dealing with here can be attributed to mental illness (the sexual obsessions of an Augustine, or the hangups of "that mad dog," "the epileptic from Tarsus," as Vitéz calls St. Paul [13])? Because, for one, behavior is not only predetermined by genetics and upbringing but, as Vitéz the behaviorist holds, it is also governed by its consequences. There is a vast difference between the harmless schizophrenic who claims to be Jesus and the zealot who claims to have been "sent" by Jesus to preach and proselytize. The former remains on the margins of society, powerless to foist his "inner theatre" on the world, whereas the latter can (and will) exploit and capitalize on human fear, and inevitably appealing to divine authority will offer his shoddy wares as "glad tidings" promising certain salvation or perdition. It is they who fashion God into a Procrustes, the interdicts and taboos being reflections of their own pathology, an externalization of their inner chamber of horrors much like the theatre of Grand-Guignol. The primary sense of the Grand-Guignol allusion is to evoke a scene of primitive, hence effective, cruelty, but it also implies artificiality, vulgarity; "popular art" as pandering to the basest instincts.

The second part of the diatribe (lines 14-17), rhetorically a parallelism of the first part, extends the initial actions of the fanatical founders of Christianity to the plane where they in actual fact "parallel" and intertwine with the temporal powers. One of the reasons for the success and survival of the Christian church has been a willingness to divest itself of its initial anti-social and apocalyptic tendencies, and after achieving the status of state religion, to act as ideological mainstay and instrument of legitimation for all subsequent secular powers, becoming in the process itself a secular power. In spite of pious lip-service to some of Jesus's teachings, the church never offered a socio-economic model that would have endangered the hegemony of either feudalism or capitalism; in fact, it repeatedly performed the state's dirty work by exterminating potential and real enemies threatening the status quo. In the "Sanctus" Vitéz cites Simon de Montfort and his crusade against the Albigensians, whose puritan beliefs and life style were an early form of Protestantism; he could also have cited Luther's cynical betrayal in 1525 of the German peasants as an example of expediency and opportunism. (In effect, Luther blessed the weapons of the nobles who then crushed the peasants, as had the Hungarian lords the revolt of Dózsa a decade earlier.)

To Vitéz's catalogue of the modern weaponry blessed by servants of the Lord comes the sudden juxtaposition of "In hoc signo vinces." The Emperor

Constantine's dream to which the quotation refers - the appearance of the cross with the words, "In this sign shalt thou conquer," i.e., he is vouchsafed a victory if he converts to the faith of the crucified Christ! - is one of the first transcendently justified calls to slaughter in the history of Christianity, and so already a travesty of the "Prince of Peace," and most likely a forged interpolation to boot. The intertext is not allowed to do its seductive work, but is further parodied by the bogus transliteration "You sign right here Vincent" as if spoken by a con-man in the final stages of coaxing a sucker into making a deal. The Latin maxim is minimized, its "original sacred" content is profanized by turning it into a phony translation which is both like and unlike the original, thereby robbing the original of its originality. The unsympathetic reader (the imaginary "angelic doctor" named in the parabasis) is dialogically included and silenced in the text; and while the not-so-unsympathetic reader's own expectations of being set straight through satire are seemingly satisfied - "of course" he/she would know line 19 is not a translation of line 18; and yet, "in a way," reading it satirically, it is, ("all transcendental authorization is [like] a con game") - they are also thwarted since the heteroglossic-ironic intrusion is "only" language whose "authority" rests purely on the homophonic possibilities of signifiers. The odd couplet is made up of free-floating fragments of chance collision and also, due to their new-found proximity, chance collusion. Linguistic authorization is also a con-game, an illusion, especially one based on a shaky and only potentially satiric suggestion emerging from the random fact of a random juxtaposition; and so line (and reader) redouble-revert into irony. Despite proximity and appearance, it is not a similarity of dissimilars that is opened up by the juxtaposition, but *difference*, the accidental randomness of arbitrary entities that do not belong together except in language; and language, its performative power notwithstanding, cannot and does not perform miracles in the "real" world. But what is the reality of the "real" apart from language?

The fact that the insatiable human hunger for power has always needed a transcendental justification, and that institutional religion, particularly Christianity, has throughout history been only too obliging in providing *In hoc signo*-like legitimation to all and sundry does not make that legitimation any more substantial since its ground is language. In lines 21-31 Vitéz attempts to "bring in the »real«" as if to buttress the generalities of the diatribe by offering a piece of "lived experience" in the autobiographical episode from the period of World War II: as the son of a field commander, he had witnessed just such an act of legitimation when the chaplain blessed the guns and men of the armoured battalion. The passage appears to remain fully in the ironic mode; and the image, "On chins of black gun barrels trembled drops of holy water,"

while neutral, is exact and powerful enough to qualify as the ironic vortex of the "Christian Hungarian military theology."

But the narrative is more (and less) than an instance of pure empirical validation, a one-to-one copy of experience in the "real" world. Step by step, Christianity's self-legitimizing metalanguage governs and orders the entire process, set off by the Constantinian device. The instruments of slaughter are blessed by a representative of Christ on earth, the chaplain himself being a mere instrument, for "in fact" it is Christ who does the blessing. The act of blessing is one of making something profane into something holy, to "sanctify" it. In the case of weapons and warriors being so sanctified, they are absolved a priori of transgression against God's commandments, becoming de facto "Christ's warriors," their war a holy war. Benediction is always accompanied by the gesture of making the cross, so the soldiers also appear to be vouchsafed a sign leading them to victory. *In hoc signe- vincetis*. The irony thus consists not so much in the true-to-life observation and memory of Vitéz at age ten, caught in an actual war, but in its textual image being an intertextual emblem, allegorically juxtaposed to its emblematic antecedent, which is none other than the crusades. Again, not the "real" crusades of history, but as they have become aestheticized in the ideological self-affirmation of all subsequent nobility (and non-nobility like the good preacher Billy Graham), as a floating signifier, a metaphor in language, an emblem of transcendental legitimation. The banner of the Virgin Mary fluttering above the freshly blessed weapons is also a métonymie emblem of similar flags flown by Hungarian "crusaders" ("*kuruc*" initially meant "crusader") against the Turkish "infidel" in the 16th and 17th centuries and the Austrian "infidel" subsequently. (Cf. the *Kuruc* song, "Két pogány közt, egy hazáért omlik ki vére" {the *kuruc* warrior {"vitéz"} sheds his blood for one country, caught between two infidels}. The traditional battle cry of Hungarian soldiers fighting the Turks was "Jesus".) "Our side" is *semper fidelis* to the Cross of Jesus, to God, to the Virgin, to faith itself; the other side is always infidel. (Vitéz will gleefully relate in the Credo and the Sanctus how all rival camps, especially during the thirty Years' War, had claimed the Lord to be on their side, presenting the absurdity in a concrete image: "Egyik táborból a másikba ugrál a Legfelsőbb Hadúr / tébolyult akrobata, - cigánykereket hány a fölbolydult Univerzumban" [41] [The Heavenly Commander-in-Chief leaps from camp to camp / mad acrobat, - throwing cartwheels in the universal upheaval].) Hitler's war, in which the Hungarian forces participated, had all the earmarks of a crusade, down to the belt buckles of the Wehrmacht soldiers inscribed with "*Gott mit uns*."

In this reading, the ironic succession (not progress!) of emblematic traces in the discourse of Christianity as shown by the *Missa* simultaneously shows

up the bankruptcy of the "Christian Hungarian military theology" and Christianity *in toto* as fiction inseparable from language, its "truth" indeed a "mobile army of metaphors and metonymies" whose fictional nature has been forgotten, as Nietzsche had said of truth in general. The ironist, mission accomplished, would press matters no further but return to his language games, knowing that... Knowing what? "I should have known," says the narrator after weapons and warriors had been properly blessed, "that the Virgin Mother / especially favors Hungarian heavy guns, while the Holy Infant / primarily gets pleasure from the blast of grenades" (lines 28-30). This would, of course, be an instance of obvious, heavy, "regular" irony, the trope of meaning the opposite of what is said, made absurd by the excess of satire. I should have known *but I didn't*, says the *iron*; I was a non-knower, an agnostic even then; I saw through my mother's sentimentalizing (nay, near-sexual excitement) over the padre and the padre's phony benediction as copy of a tribal ritual, a par excellence instance of tribalism itself. What I *did know* was that poor ignorant men were about to be led to the slaughter.

But what happens if we follow a literal reading of the sentence? As Paul de Man had tirelessly demonstrated, an identical syntactical pattern can engender two meanings that are mutually exclusive. The literal meaning of "I should have known" implies not a painful triumph of the kind of *agnosis* that unmasks illusions, but the rueful recognition of a loss - the loss of being at home within the warm and secure fold of the tribe and of God. His *agnosis*, whether he knew it at the time or not, was contained by the *gnosis* of the illusory nature of the triad, which in that very instant made him into an outsider and an ironist, which comes to the same thing. He became for ever exiled from that realm where sign and referent, emblem and world composed an indissoluble union. The self that "knew" the Virgin's partiality to the guns of the Hungarians would be a "naive" self only from the vantage point of the self that "did not know." The irony of ironies consists precisely in a knowledge of the split consciousness of the *iron*, the second self coming to a *gnosis* (in hindsight) of what it "should have known" if it had not always already been split from that first (naive, historical) self so that it could have remained in the safety of a whole and "rounded" world, instead of inhabiting the arbitrary universe of language, meandering, like Lukács's novelistic hero, in a state of transcendental homelessness.

The literal meaning of "I should have known" is inescapably tinged with nostalgia, and opens the way to the legitimating ground of satire. It can perhaps now be seen that the satiric parabases emanate from the second self *as if it were in the state of the first*, hoping to arrest the unending to-and-fro

movement of ironic play. (Despite appearances, the *agon* of irony and satire is not a replay of the conflict of the "unhappy consciousness"; for one, language plays no role in Hegel's scheme; for another, there is no *Geist* in sight to underwrite the struggle.) The appeal of the de-ironized voice is primarily to Jesus, "standing," as it were, untouched behind the havoc of Christian centuries, whose "presence" calls forth the satirist's ire:

A Te szentségeddel	[With your holiness
a Te urasággal	with your domination
a Te tetetlen trónoddal	with your ethereal throne
nincs nekem bánatom,	I have no quarrel
nincsen lázongásom.	I have no dispute
Csak a rikoltozó	Only with the shrieking
hőkölő pózoló	clamoring posturing
füstölőlengető	censer-wielding
díszdicsőítőekkel, satb.	glory-glorifiers, etc.]

The emblems of illusion, the armies of mendacious metaphors wielded by Christians appear to cover up the "real" Jesus, making the road to his unsullied presence near impenetrable. But he is "really" *there*; and if we ask, just exactly where *there* is, the narrator provides unambiguous answer. Jesus is to be known from the "deepest, most secret core of our heart" ("szívünk legtitkosabb zugából" [20]). Are we back with Pascal, and the heart's reasons which reason knows nothing about? Possibly; although the narrator alludes more often to the *behavior and psychology* of the historical Jesus rather than to his "ethereal throne," and also to those who resemble Jesus in their active life as distinct from the glorifiers and hypocrites. In the Gloria, after *Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris, Amen*, comes this series of rapid juxtapositions:

-Sz. Sz. atya pofoz, haját húz-
dicsőség-térdeltet- Jézus nem pofozott-
őt ütötték-nem térdeltetett-térdelt-mégis,
az Atyaúrsten dicsőségében-Szént Ferenc nem húzta
a gyermekek haját-az állatok is kezére simultak [24]
[-Father Sz. Sz. slaps face, pulls hair-
makes one kneel for glory-Jesus slapped no one
they beat him-made no one kneel-he knelt—still,
in the glory of God the Father-St. Francis didn't pull
children's hair-his hand tamed even animals].

The behavior of Jesus (and St. Francis) is thus an example set for humans to imitate. One should begin by not beating up on children; but since the

narrator-satirist has very little faith in human nature, he more and more appeals to Jesus for some actual intervention, especially to give aid to children in pain. At the end of the *Agnus Dei*, in the long list appended to *Dona nobis pacem* [give us peace]: "[adj békét] a színes képernyőn éhkoppot nyelő bengali csecsemőnek / (neki különösen)" [45] [{give peace} to the starving Bengali infant on the TV screen / to him especially]. How should Jesus do this? First, he should make faith in him more accessible:

ó szentséges Jézus	[O holy Jesus
de komplikált vagy	you're so complicated
pedig hányat ismerek	yet I know so many
akik körülülénének	who'd gather around you
meg is hallgatnának	and would listen to you
Csészealj szemű gyerekek	Children with huge eyes
öregék remegő fehér bajusz [27]	old men trembling white moustache]

And what would the simplified Son of Man say to children and old people? Vitéz appears to be echoing the sentiments of the great reformers of the 16th century - whom he ridiculed with such relish - who wanted to simplify the road to salvation by doing away with the seemingly superfluous dogmas, doctrines, and liturgical excesses accumulating around the medieval church. *Sola fides, sola scriptum, sola gratia* - according to Luther, this trinity is all a Christian needs; and the Anabaptists created a whole way of life out of scripture. A passage near the end of the *Gloria* seems to indicate something more specific than a return to Luther, Zwingli, or Menno Simons. The theme of suffering children is repeated as the narrator again addresses Jesus directly:

Jesus Anguillo (kolumbiai névrokonod) köldöke ványadt
 " " elhagyott gyermek [...]
 képe a jólkomponált italhirdetés mellett sírdogál az Időújságban. (Time Magazin)
 "J. A. a te szereteted igényli" (az olvasót?) (szentolvasót?)
 J. C, a Te dicsőséged J. A. köldökében vagon
 ahol a világ tengelye fordul. (Revolutio.) [24]
 [Jesus Anguillo (your namesake in Columbia) has a shrivelled navel
 " " is an abandoned child [...]
 his picture whimpering beside the well-designed liquor ad in Time Magazine.
 "J. A. needs your love" (the reader's?) (untransl. pun)
 J. C, your glory is to be found in J. A.'s navel
 where the axis of the world revolves. (Revolutio.)]

Here again, the text could be made to support two readings. If taken as seriously addressed to Jesus by a believer, then it is a reprimand to the Savior

for allowing children to suffer. His true glory is in the alleviation of such needless suffering, for if Providence has anything to do at all with this world, and if Jesus' death and resurrection have any meaning whatsoever, then children should not be made to endure pain. As part of the Holy Trinity, Jesus the Christ should be able to manage at least this much. According to another reading, the reprimand is more ominous if the historical references of the intertext are considered more fully. The image of the whimpering child from the third world set in the glossy pages of an American magazine is replete with irony, and is another con job - an allegorical emblem pictorially citing "Suffer the little children to come to me," in the hopes of softening tough capitalist hearts and opening wallets. But instead of being directed at Jesus (wherever he may be), the warning seems to imply that unless poverty and hunger are eliminated in the world by human beings (publishers, advertisers, and readers of *Time* magazine alike), Jesus and the religion named after him will be powerless to stop millions of desperate Indios and Bengalis from revolting, or, even though made up of vacuous fictions and a host of metaphors, they may inspire such a *revolutio*.

But if Vitéz appears to be toying with some form of liberation theology based on Jesus's good actions, on human solidarity, Schweitzer-like altruism and the like, such attempts are undone by the ironies of his text directed at others with similar motives (the bleeding-heart liberals of "good will" displacing their *mauvaise conscience* to some nebulous xenophilia of the "wretched of the earth"). Vitéz's *sátire* goes soft at this point, since he is not a satirist but an ironist at heart; the suffering of little children elicits prayer and pathos and not the satirist's toughness (cf. Swift's modest proposal when confronting the starving children of Ireland). What really remains is some lip service to the gentleness of Jesus (forgetting that Jesus has little meaning if his divinity is disregarded), but it is half-hearted and unable to countermand the corrosive work of irony. Since most of the appeals to Jesus are phrased in the conditional, they seem to indicate the impatience of a disillusioned perfectionist when surveying the way of the world. Give up peace, says the voice in the *Agnus Dei*, but after this plea comes the word of the ironic agnostic: *Leave* us in peace. For:

...áfium ellen nem orvosság a béke,
 bendős éhségen zsoldár nem segít;
 kapkodunk hát kardunkhoz eszelősen
 de a markolat helyén is penge nőtt. [45]
 [peace is no remedy for poison
 psalm is no help for starving bellies
 we reach for our sword in desperation
 but the hilt, too, has become a blade]

The intertext at first appears to underline the "liberation-theological" impatience with doctrine and no action. "Peace is no remedy for poison" alludes to the great 17th century poet and warrior, Count Miklós Zrínyi and his tract on military strategy, *A török áfiun ellen való orvosság* [A remedy for the Turkish poison], and its famous motto proclaiming the antidote: "Fegyver, fegyver, fegyver kívántatik és jó vitézi resolutio" [We need arms, arms, arms, and strong military resolve]. But the resolution of Vitéz cannot advocate a resorting to arms: our very weapons would turn on us if we tried to use them on others. Zrínyi 's example is also an ironic reminder of the kind of resolve that is no longer possible, for such a stance is part and parcel of that whole and "rounded world" available solely to the "naive", undivided consciousness, the world the ironist had renounced the moment he knew he did not know.

With the ground of the satire becoming itself groundless - in any event, the example and teaching of Jesus are enclosed within "scripture," a writing - the narrative returns to irony, but just as satiric parabases had earlier on invaded and perhaps "toned down" ironic poliphony, so in the final parts of the poem a new component enters, what may paradoxically be termed "post-ironic irony", somewhat analogous to what Paul de Man had named the "stance of wisdom."⁷ The ending of the Agnus Dei quoted above, but more explicitly the final part. *Ite missa est*, no longer harbor a nostalgia for lost wholeness, for a recuperation of the mode of being Kierkegaard had called "the knight of faith." The "post-ironic ironic" consciousness cannot and will not renounce irony, but it moves to adjust it to make visible the ultimate end of its play, and all play, through the restful contemplation of death. The *Ite missa est* begins with a pun, or rather the literal translation of "Tridentine" ("three-toothed") - "Menjetek: vége a háromfogú misének" [Go, the three-toothed mass is over] - and it continues to sustain the metaphor of the three teeth sinking into different substances. But the play is also a recapitulation of the entire agnostic mass, the effects of the Latin mass on itself, and through it, the effect of Christianity on the narrative subject. The progression of the actions of the "teeth" - "Az első fog valódi húsba tépett"; "Lelket őröl a második fog"; "A harmadik fog bölcsességfog" [The first tooth tore into real flesh; The second tooth grinds the soul; The third tooth is wisdom tooth] - is not fortuitous, but recalls, first, the psychology of the church fathers and the units making up the total human being (somatic, psychic, pneumatic) and closely allied with it, the levels or layers of interpretation applicable to scripture. According to Origen, "Just as the human being consists of body, soul, and spirit, so does Holy Scripture, which God had inspired for man's salvation."⁸ In spite of adhering to the order of the (submerged) religious intertext, which being a parody, still invites an ironic reading, the final lines turn the play against itself and affirms an order that contains both *gnosis* and *agnosis*:

A harmadik fog bölcsességfog
 állkapcsunkban későn virágozik
 (fogósdit játszunk acélfogóval)
 és zsibbadunk. Elegáns injekcióval
 már az örökös fájdalom partja se látszik.
 [The third tooth is wisdom tooth
 it blooms late in our jaw
 (we play catch with steel pliers)
 and go numb. An elegant needle
 makes invisible the shores of eternal pain].

The figurai language is very compact, but it is not needlessly cryptic, nor is it a full return to irony. The play of catch is the play of life and death; only we humans know what is at stake in this play, yet we still play on. The "elegant needle" is properly both literal and allegorical: the former is the needle of good and easy death; the latter, the injection of some artful evasion of death such as good writing that momentarily dissolves the true world of pain and sorrow. But being in the "stance of wisdom," the post-ironic subject now knows literal and figurai to be one, and is able to stand both inside and outside, for it, as de Man writes, "however painful, sees things as they actually are."⁹ If *Missa agnostica* is an "orphan" text, as postulated above, it is because its narrating subject accepts his own orphanhood, acknowledging as distant kin only the Kierkegaardian "knight of infinite resignation." But orphans, like the Jesus Anguillos of the world with whom the narrator has shown solidarity, can also play; the whimpering picture is not the whole picture. Play is available to the adult orphan as well, especially as he had orphaned himself when he chose to follow the road of his *docta ignorantia* wherever it took him. The entry of post-ironic irony does not inject a lugubrious tone into Vitéz' text; quite the contrary: as in Yeats' *Lapis Lazuli*, the gaiety and enormous tragic fun of *free play* still transfigures all that dread. And the agnostic mass still remains a mass, celebrating the rites of play against ennui and bad faith, while quietly acknowledging the "shores of eternal pain" as its ultimately impassable boundaries.

Notes

1. References throughout this paper are to *Missa agnostica* (Paris: Magyar Műhely, 1979). The poem also appears in Vitéz's collected poems, *Az ájtatos manó imája* (Szombathely: Életünk könyvek, 1991) 125-164.
2. Jacques Derrida, "Living on/Border Lines" in Harold Bloom, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York, 1979), 83.

3. See Baudelaire's "De l'essence de rire," in *Curiosités esthétiques* (Paris, 1962); Schlegel, "Athenaeum Fragment" no. 116.1 am indebted for these references to the article by Paul de Man, noted below.
4. See Eugene F. Rice, *The Foundations of Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1970), 155 and ff.
5. *Ibid.*, 156.
6. *Ibid.*, 71.
7. "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis, 1983), 224.
8. *De principiis*, 4. 2. 4.
9. De Man, *op. cit.*, 224.