GYÖRGY BODNÁR

MODERNITY RECONSIDERED

I am pleased to welcome the participants at the third conference of Bayreuth University and the Institute of Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and I am happy to verify the involvement of Pécs University in our decennial cooperation. I don't think I need to overemphasize the importance of this cooperation in terms of the spiritual and intellectual opening it represents. The given historical circumstances under which Hungarians have been compelled to live in the past few decades make the setting up and organization of such a series of conferences a true achievement. I have always believed in it and I fully believe in its future too.

Naturally, the continuity of our cooperation has not depended solely on our intentions. It is hardly possible to maintain a scientific programme unless it undertakes the task of clarifying real research problems. I believe in our attempts to do so with precision.

I am convinced of the fact that the history of literature is a dialogue and this dialogue is the confrontation of different historical situations and interpretations. Consequently classical modernity — the first turning point of twentieth century literature — is not only a counterpart of postmodernism, but its prehistory, too. Classical — or aesthetical — modernity had as its central topics the depressing conflicts of art and life, imagination and reality, reflection and vitality. Although when qualifying the conflict of art and life as depressing, we call into question the family relationship between the Modern and the Postmodern paradigm, however, we do not exclude the justification of raising this question. Tracing back Postmodernism is not an unauthorized act even if it leads us to discover

negative answers. But in this tracing back the system's theoretical line of argumentation, which states that every system is completely valid only in itself, may help us; thus, a reply formulating the reconciliation of the conflict between life and art is as much a symptom of a hopeless fight for completeness as the conception of autonomy in Postmodernism. It is a point to take into consideration that this autonomy wishes to construe itself upon the deconstructed role of the writer and Aristotelian-mimetic poetics, as well as upon the maintenance of the intertextual state of creation, and upon the abandoning of causal teleology. That is, it wishes to construe itself on answers which, in the absence of the issues of the aesthetics of mimesis, would land in an infinite space without any points of reference. It is not to say that their validity should be called into question, just a warning that these questions and replies are components of a historical process, and they do not contain their truthfulness in themselves; this lies, instead, in the historical process. If Modernism and Postmodernism have a common denominator, it must be the desire for the autonomy of art. And if there is a paradigm change between the two, it appears in the struggle against the principle of mimesis: the characteristic Post-Modern work is about itself, that is, it presents the consciousness attached to itself as a form exact in the process of elaboration.

But if it is true, as a pure formula, that the autonomous work can define itself only after its completion, why should we expect that the literary process leading to autonomy to take a teleological form? Almost every trait of the work liberated from the constraints of mimesis appears in a more or less pure form as of the beginnings of Modernism. Besides those that I have mentioned, here we find devices such as the overt admission of fictionality, abandoning the rational causality principle, and as a consequence, challenging the rational epic reliability, as well as the degradation of the role of the plot and the ragged and open structure; all these devices contributed to the development of the Modernist poetics of the novel, a poetics sceptical about the truth of nineteenth century Realism. The

work, then, was led to an intertextual position, where the text is not a realization of a teleology any more, but rather a relation and a phenomenon of progressive nature. And this very strategy is hidden in the narrative mode which does not yet aim at aimlessness but crosses the borderlines of representation and information, and wishes to translate the colours, the music and the spiritual essences which have no room in the boxes of conceptions. And one should also mention the problem of literary language. This problem has haunted verbal art from the very beginnings but it was in much greater emphasis through the ideal of autonomous literature, at the time of the birth of Modernism than in the earlier conceptions of literature. The closed system of everyday language must have been rendered open not only by Post-Modern literature; every work generating its single motives by its literariness makes use of language as another system which strives to block the automatism of everyday communication, in order to turn the attention towards the world of experiences beyond conceptions, and in order to represent — to use Endre Ady's beautiful and exact phrasing — the halo round the moon of words.

The historical connection between the Modern and the Post-Modern can be discovered not only in devices and poetic principles but also in the underlying ideas and issues of the age. It is well known that philosophical scepticism and alienation have already motivated Modern ambitions, and although these ambitions did not incline the hierarchized world view of the nineteenth century to take anarchy upon themselves, they presented, from the time of Impressionism, only a nonhierarchized world representation as valid.

As can be seen, the debates about Post-Modernism have convinced me to take the side of those who do not want to reduce the importance of the new motivations behind Post-Modernism but are reluctant to oppose in a dogmatical way Modernism and Post-Modernism.

I hope my opening remarks have convinced you of the fact that this conference is not only an exchange of abstract ideas, but the confrontation of the principles and methods for research into the whole of twentieth century literature, which includes the requirement of universality.