



How Do Diaries Begin? The Narrative Rites of Adolescent Diaries in Hungary

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ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

This paper examines the narrative tropes of Hungarian adolescent diaries written during and after World War II, primarily focusing on the rhetorical forms of beginning a diary that fall into two categories characteristic of adolescent diary-writing – beginning with an introduction describing the author and their environment, or beginning with a memoir in which the author summarizes the most important events of the period between their birth and the start of the diary. The paper also discusses how adolescents personified their diary books and in addressing the persona of the diary seemed, often, to seek to establish a dialogue with their future adult selves.

ABSTRACT IN HUNGARIAN

A tanulmány magyar kamasznaplók narratív elemeit vizsgálja a második világháború alatt és azt követően. Döntően a naplókezdés nyelvi formáit elemzi, amelynek két kamaszfeljegyzésekre jellemző változata van: az egyik a szerzőt és környezetét leíró bemutatkozással, a másik pedig a memoárral induló, amely a szerző születése és a napló megkezdése közötti időszak főbb eseményeit összegzi. A tanulmány tárgyalja azt is, hogy a naplóírás, mint dialógus során miként személyesítették meg füzeteiket és miként szánták azokat felnőtt önmaguknak a kamaszok.

Keywords: diary-writing, narrative methods, adolescent diaries, Hungary, Second World War, life writing

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out to reframe the question that constitutes the title of Philippe Lejeune's famous paper, *How Do Diaries End?* (Lejeune 99–113). Unlike Lejeune, the majority of historians tend to consider diaries only as historical sources and often neglect the characteristics of the genre itself, which are treated as self-evident. This trend can also be traced in scholarship focusing on the analysis of diaries where this issue is often completely ignored, and is especially evident in scholarly literature on adolescent diaries (see Makatou, Vice, Stargardt, Baggerman and Dekker) where there is virtually no analysis of the narrative characteristics of these diaries.

This paper examines the diary entries of twelve Hungarian contemporaries of Anne Frank, who were all born between 1920 and 1936 and began to keep their diaries as adolescents (before their twentieth birthday). I analyze the discursive rites or narrative rituals of diary-writing in twelve adolescent diaries to discern the narrative or technical elements that transform these written documents into diaries. Regarding the narrative strategies of diary-writing, I first examine how these adolescents began to write their diaries by discussing the various types of introductory passages preceding the first official diary entry, or in the absence of such, the first entries themselves. I also examine how these adolescents personified and related to their diaries.

This paper focuses exclusively on Hungarian-language adolescent diaries, but the narrative strategies examined here may also be applicable to the adolescent diaries of other countries, which are likely similar to the diaries discussed in this paper.

ABOUT THE DIARIES

I analyze twelve diaries in this paper. Half of them are published. In my research I examined almost every published Hungarian diary which was written by an adolescent and which met my set criterion (that the writer began to keep diary before their twentieth birthday). From the six unpublished diaries, two can be found in public collections in Budapest. For instance, the diary of Éva Kornássy (pseudonym) can be found in the Budapest Archives,¹ while Klára Márkosi's (pseudonym) manuscript is available as part of the manuscript collection of the National Széchényi Library.²

For the purposes of this paper, I supplemented published adolescent diaries and diaries found in public collections with unpublished and privately owned diaries from my own private collection. The four diaries

from my collection were collected through advertisements and consist of hand-written documents that have not been published to this day³ – unlike Great Britain (Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex), Germany (Deutsches Tagebucharchiv, Emmendingen), France (Association pour l'Autobiographie, Ambérieu-en-Bugey) or Austria (Sammlung Frauennachlässe, University of Vienna), Hungary has no institutes dedicated to preserving private documents (diaries, letters, memoirs) to save them from disappearing without a trace. To collect diaries, I published advertisements and anyone could respond so long as the manuscript in their possession was a diary rather than a memoir: so far my collection comprises twenty-eight diaries written by Christian and Jewish persons in the first half of the twentieth century. Of the eleven adolescent diaries in my collection, I chose the four longest manuscripts for analysis, but the other seven diaries do not differ from these four diaries in terms of their narrative characteristics.

The four privately owned and unpublished diaries presented in this paper have been anonymized as per the request of the people who entrusted me with the manuscripts. With regard to the authors, Béla Halász (pseudonym), who started keeping his diary in 1948, personally offered the manuscript for analysis, while Judit Molnár (pseudonym) submitted her own diary written between 1943 and 1956, as well as the diary entries of her sister Margit Molnár (pseudonym) written between 1941 and 1949, the two diaries amounting to over twenty volumes combined. The fourth diary, which was written between 1934 and 1946 by Sára Nagy (pseudonym) and comprises three thick volumes, was sent to me after being found at a clearance in Budapest. As per the request of the authors, the diary manuscripts in my private collection cannot be made available to third persons, and the majority of diary writers did not permit me to publish data that could be used to identify them or their family members. Their fear of being traced is likely due to personal experiences during World War II and the Hungarian post-war communist period, therefore I respected the wishes of these writers and anonymized the entries of all unpublished diaries in accordance with Act LXIII of 1992 on the Protection of Personal Data and the Disclosure of Information.

THE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE ADOLESCENT DIARY-WRITERS

Before I begin my analysis, it is important to look at the religious and social backgrounds of adolescent diary writers, as well as their parents' choice of educational institutions. After examining the diaries, we may

Most important information about the analyzed diaries

Author	Author's religion	Ownership	Title of the published version (for more details see the Bibliography)	Dates covered by diary
Császár, Gyula 1928–2007	Roman Catholic	Published	Történelmünk – történetem, 1942–1996: egy orvos naplója	1942–1996
Ecséri, Lilla 1928–1986	Jewish / Roman Catholic	Published	Napló, 1944 egy tizenhat éves kislány naplójának eredeti szövege	1944–1945
Halász, Béla (pseudonym) 1930-	Jewish	Copy of the unpublished manuscript in the Author's private collection	–	1948
Kornássy, Éva (pseudonym) 1925–1987	Calvinist	Unpublished manuscript, Budapest City Archives	–	1940–1947
Márkosi, Klára (pseudonym) 1932-?	Roman Catholic	Unpublished manuscript, National Széchényi Library, Budapest	–	1944–1945
Molnár, Judit (pseudonym) 1934-	Roman Catholic	Unpublished manuscript, Author's private collection	–	1943–1956
Molnár, Margit (pseudonym) 1927–2001	Roman Catholic	Unpublished manuscript, Author's private collection	–	1941–1949
Nagy, Sára (pseudonym) 1920-?	Jewish	Unpublished manuscript, Author's private collection	–	1934–1946
Somlay, Gizella 1936-	Roman Catholic	Published	Tiszaföldvári napló, 1951–1953	1951–1953
Szabó, Magdolna Matild 1926–1989	Calvinist	Published	Napló 1943–1946	1943–1946
Szenes, Anna 1921–1944	Jewish	Published	Napló, levelek, versek, szépirodalmi kísérletek, rövidebb írások	1934–1944
Weinmann, Éva 1928–1946	Jewish	Published	The diary of Eva Weinmann: 10 October 1941–19 January 1945	1941–1945

safely say that the majority of the adolescent writers of the twelve diaries belonged to the middle class or *petite bourgeoisie*, and their parents likely selected a particular educational institute based on their own value system and religion (or lack thereof). Parents could either send their children to state schools or schools maintained by religious institutions, and where parents preferred the former over the latter, we may assume that they did not consider religious education to be of primary importance. However, regardless of whether parents chose a state or religious school for their children, religious education was compulsory in the interwar period and every student received religious education according to their religious affiliation.

The majority of the twelve adolescent diary-writers began keeping their diaries during World War II. There are five Jewish adolescent diarists. Éva Weinmann was born in 1928 and began keeping her diary in 1941 while attending a Jewish high school in Budapest, where her father worked in the catering industry. Éva died in 1946 at a very young age from leukemia (Weinmann 27). Anna Szenes, born in 1921, also hailed from a Hungarian Jewish family and her father was a famous journalist, writer and prolific playwright in the interwar period. Anna attended a Calvinist high school and began writing her diary as early as 1934 (Szenes 12). Jewish Sára Nagy, born in 1920 and starting her diary in 1934, also attended a Calvinist high school in Pécs, and her father was a mining engineer in the basalt mines of Sümeg. Lilla Ecséri (born in 1928) is the only adolescent diary-writer among the twelve whose family could truly be considered part of the elite due to the fact that her father was a bank director. The Ecséri family converted to Roman Catholicism around 1941–1942 to ensure safer life conditions. Lilla began writing her diary in 1944 while attending a state high school (Kunt 385). Finally, Béla Halász, born in 1930, attended a Jewish elementary school and then a state high school, and his father was an insurance agent in a city in the Alföld region that I shall not specify at the request of the author. Béla began writing his diary in 1948, the year he graduated from high school (Kunt 53).

There are five Roman Catholic diary-writers examined in this paper, two of whom were sisters and the others unrelated. The sisters, Margit Molnár (born in 1927) and her younger sister Judit (born in 1934), both attended a Roman Catholic high school in Budapest, where their father was an engineer at the Budapest Electric Company. Margit began her diary in 1941, and Judit followed her sister's example when she began keeping her own diary in 1943 (Kunt 28–29). Unlike the sisters, Gyula Császár, born in 1928, attended a state high school despite his religious affiliation, and his father was a headwaiter and then the proprietor of a cafeteria in Budapest. Gyula began writing his diary in 1942 as practice

for becoming a writer (Császár 5–6). Klára Márkosi, born in 1932, was the daughter of a lawyer in Nyíregyháza, and in the fall of 1944, the family was forced to leave the city for Budapest due to the advance of hostile troops. Klára began writing her diary during the siege of Budapest that same year (Kunt 28). Finally, Gizella Somlay was born in 1936 as the daughter of a major general who served in the Hungarian army during World War II, and her family was deported to Tiszaföldvár village from Budapest in 1951 (Krausz and Varga 594). Gizella attended a Catholic convent until the secularization of religious schools in 1948, and began writing her diary in 1951 to record her life in deportation.

Of the twelve adolescent diary-writers, only two were of Calvinist faith, Éva Kornássy and Magdolna Matild Szabó. Éva, born in 1925, lived in Pestszenterzsébet where her father worked as an architect. She attended a Calvinist high school in Budapest when she began keeping a diary in 1940 (Kunt 27). Magdolna, born in 1926, lived in Szováta [Sovata] in Transylvania and her father was a butcher working at a slaughterhouse. Magdolna attended the Calvinist Teacher Training School in Székelyudvarhely [Odorheiu Secuiesc] when she began writing her diary in 1943 (Szabó 221–222).

Sára Nagy was born in 1920 and started her diary in 1934 while Gizella Somlay was born in 1936 and began her own diary in 1951, which means a period of seventeen years passed between the earliest and latest adolescent diaries examined in this paper; therefore, to provide a historical context for the diaries, it is important briefly to consider the most important events transpiring between 1920 and 1951.

In 1920, World War I officially ended with the Trianon Treaty, which caused Hungary to lose two-thirds of its former territory and led several Hungarian families to abandon their homes for the remaining Hungarian territories. For instance, the families of Gyula Császár and Sára Nagy lived in regions that now form part of Slovakia and left their hometowns for the remaining territories. Some families, however, decided to stay and were consequently detached from Hungary, such as the family of Magdolna Matild Szabó, who lived with her parents in Sovata in Transylvania, now part of Romania. In the interwar period, the Hungarian political system made several attempts to bring about a revision of the Trianon Treaty, and their efforts were somewhat successful in the second half of the 1930s and 1940, when Northern-Transylvania and Szeklerland were returned to Hungary, including Sovata where Magdolna and her family lived.

Between 1920 and 1944, Hungary was led by Governor Miklós Horthy, and the views of his anti-Semitic right-wing Hungarian government were gaining ground in the wake of the global economic crisis, leading to the *numerus clausus*, and twenty-one other anti-Jewish laws as well

as numerous regulations issued between 1938 and 1944. The Jew Laws were essentially a way of barring a growing number of persons classified as Jews from intellectual and economic careers, and even from marriage between Jews and non-Jewish persons. For instance, the above mentioned *numerus clausus* was issued in 1920 to limit the entry of Jewish students into universities until the end of World War II. The rest of the Jew Laws also affected the majority of the adolescent writers examined here. For example, Béla Halász's father was an insurance agent and could only find work through a Christian mediator, Sára Nagy's father was discharged several times from his job as a mining engineer, and Éva Weimann's father turned from restaurant proprietor in 1941 to a mere employee afterwards. Only Lilla Ecséri and her family were exempt from discrimination due to the fact that her father was a highly decorated World War I veteran and his merits secured protection and privileges for his family. However, anti-Semitism was a pervasive part of their everyday life and school life as well, which led one of the adolescents, Anna Szenes, to become a Zionist and emigrate to Palestine following her graduation in 1939. In 1942 labor service was declared compulsory for Jewish men, which essentially meant forced labor for the fathers of Sára Nagy and Béla Halász.

In June 1941, Hungary entered World War II on the side of the Axis powers and declared war on the Soviet Union, but in 1944, Germany occupied Hungary and devastated the already marginalized Hungarian Jewish population, who had been living in relative safety compared to Jews in occupied neighboring countries despite the anti-Semitic discriminatory measures of the Hungarian government. Due to pressure from the Germans and with the enthusiastic cooperation of Hungarian authorities, cities all over the country began segregating Jews in ghettos, while in Budapest, authorities moved Jewish families to houses marked with the Star of David. Between May and June 1944, almost the entire Hungarian Jewish population was deported to Auschwitz, and only a few cities managed to appeal to authorities so that their Jewish residents would be sent to forced labor camps instead of death camps. Béla Halász and his mother were deported in the summer of 1944 to a forced labor camp near Vienna, where they managed to survive and later return to Hungary. In June 1944, deportations ceased by order of Governor Miklós Horthy, ensuring the survival of Jews in Budapest including Éva Weimann, Sára Nagy and Lilla Ecséri. Meanwhile, Anna Szenes emigrated to Palestine in 1939 and enlisted in the British Army as volunteer in 1943. She returned to Hungary as a paratrooper to assist partisans but was immediately captured and executed for capital treason in November 1944.

On October 15, 1944, Governor Miklós Horthy attempted to withdraw Hungary from the war, but his attempt was sabotaged by the German-supporting Arrow Cross officials of the Hungarian army, and an Arrow Cross government soon assumed control with the help of German forces. However, the Red Army was advancing as well, which caused Klára Márkosi's family to escape to Budapest from Nyíregyháza, and in December 1944, they and the other adolescent writers from Budapest were caught in the Soviet siege of the Hungarian capital. While the Soviets advanced, the Arrow Cross was terrorizing the Jewish population, many of whom were shot into the Danube, but in February 1945, after two months of constant siege, the entire capital was brought under Soviet occupation. Following the liberation of Hungary from the German armed forces, Béla Halász and his mother returned from deportation to their home in the Alföld in summer of 1945.

Between 1945 and 1948, the Stalinist Communist Party gradually assumed control of Hungary and established a communist dictatorship. In 1948, all religious schools were secularized and the adolescent diary-writers were forced into state education. Gizella Somlay's family was deported in 1951 because her father was a major general of the infantry during World War II. He was sentenced to forced labor in the Gulags by the Soviet military court for his retaliatory strikes against civilian residents of the Soviet Union on territories occupied by the Hungarian army during World War II (Krausz and Varga 225–231).

HOW DO DIARIES BEGIN?

In his paper *How Do Diaries End?* Philippe Lejeune concludes that the beginning of a diary is usually of prime importance and therefore diaries tend to begin with a name, title, motto, resolution or introduction: "The beginning of a diary is almost always indicated: it is rare to begin one without saying so. In one way or another, you mark off this new territory of writing—with a name, a title, an epigraph, a commitment, a self-presentation..." (Lejeune 187) This description is largely applicable to the entries of adolescents, but we can also trace other narrative elements in the examined diaries that do not apply to the diary entries of adults and are only characteristic of adolescent diaries.

In certain cases, regardless of religious affiliation, diaries begin with an invocation before their first official entry. For example, Éva Weinmann,⁴ who was Jewish, begins her record of daily events with a short prayer, resolution and an agenda characteristic of adolescent diary entries: "I begin in the name of God. I promise to write all my joy, sorrow

and secrets into this little booklet. Dated in Budapest on 10th October, 1941” (Weinmann 3). Éva Weinmann was born in 1928 in Budapest to a religious middle-class Jewish family, and in her case, the invocation is not an appeal to a muse but calling on God’s name for help. Sára Nagy, who is also of Jewish religion, was born in 1920 and begins her diary the same way: “On X. 31, 1934. I begin in the name of God!”⁵ Éva Kornássy, a fifteen-year-old Calvinist schoolgirl began her diary in 1940 with the Latin equivalent of this exact phrase, *In nomine Dei!*⁶ She retained this formula in her diary entries for years – almost every diary book she had written begins with this phrase in the middle of the first page, followed by *Anno Domini* and the current year written below. In August 1943, Roman Catholic Judit Molnár, who was only nine years old at the time, also began her diary with the formula, “I begin in the name of God!”. In keeping a diary, Judit followed the example of her older sister (Margit Molnár), who was seven years older and began writing her own diary in 1941.

None of the diary authors discussed above provide any explanation as to why they deemed it necessary to begin their diaries “in the name of God” – they apparently considered it self-evident that the empty booklet before them should start with these words. However, other private documents such as memoirs are usually entirely devoid of invocations or references to God, which suggests that the ritual of beginning a diary is different from that of other documents. This raises the question of why adolescents of entirely different sociocultural backgrounds began their diary entries the same way, but while it would be convenient to attribute their choice to religious conviction, Éva Kornássy had questioned her own Calvinist faith and the existence of God countless times in her entries and yet began each new diary with the name of God. In addition, Judit Molnár’s older sister Margit considered it unnecessary to begin her diary with the name of God despite the fact that both sisters were born and raised in the same religious Roman Catholic family.

In Hungarian Catholic, Protestant and Jewish culture, beginning “in the name of God” or “in the name of the Lord” is an ancient tradition where the believer places themselves and their fate in God’s hand and prays for God’s help in future endeavors. In Christian tradition, this formulaic phrase is tied to the start of labor and activities or the beginning of a journey, and it continued to remain in use long after it has lost its religious connotations. The young adolescents of the examined diaries likely picked up the phrase not only in the course of socialization in the family, but also as part of their religious education in school. Due to religious tradition, “in the name of God” became an element of celebrating beginnings and students would hear the phrase over and over in the course of their everyday activities, such as masses and prayer,

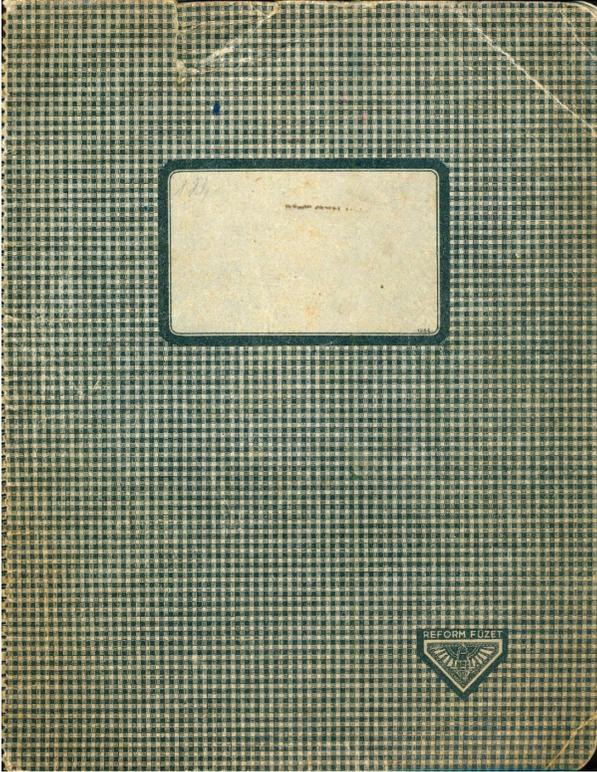
opening ceremonies and as part of their reading in literature class. The fact that both Jewish and Christian adolescents use this formulaic phrase regardless of religious affiliation can therefore be attributed to Jewish and Christian traditions, as well common everyday experiences in the interwar period.

To adolescent diary authors, calls for help that include a reference to God may have symbolized a new beginning, the start of a new era. Beginning a diary is a future-oriented enterprise and the fate of the empty pages is uncertain since it is impossible to know at the beginning whether the diary would be filled and if so, with what content. We may therefore assume that the name of God was written down to counterbalance this doubt and the indiscernible future regardless of religious affiliation. In addition to providing a stable point of reference, invocations and calling on God for help may also be considered a writing strategy of adolescents that hails back to the epics or literature they had read and is intended as a ceremonial beginning of their own work where they act as the protagonists.

Some of the adolescent diary authors examined in this paper chose a prayer to begin their diary. For example, the 1951 diary of Gizella Somlay begins with one of the lines of Our Father: “Thy will be done...” (Somlay 7). Similarly, Calvinist Magdolna Szabó quotes the Book of Psalms: “The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?” (Szabó 13). Although these diaries do not begin explicitly with the name of God, the motive behind the gesture is the same – both instances reference the uncertain future to be contained in the diary and call on God for help.

References to God can be further interpreted as part of an oath of honesty, especially in the case of Éva Weinmann, who continued her call for help with a promise of writing down all her joys and sorrows. (Weinmann 3). As her diary – just like those of her contemporaries – was not accessible to the public, only God could bear witness to her resolution to record everything in an honest manner.

Calling on God for help is not a universal characteristic of the adolescent diaries examined in this paper. In the preface of his diary written in 1942 when he was only fourteen years old, Gyula Császár considered diary-writing as a mental exercise and intellectual challenge that proved his maturity and also required determination and regularity. Gyula Császár was Roman Catholic. Although his diary does not begin with an invocation, we may consider the preface a special case of invocation where the author’s faith in themselves provides a stable basis for their sustained efforts: “I consider myself strong enough to do this at such a young age and at such a time as this” (Császár 5).



The majority of adolescent authors – Béla Halász, Sára Nagy, Margit and Judit Molnár, Anna Szenes, Éva Kornássy – used exercise books as dairy book. On the picture the cover of Sára Nagy’s diary. (Author’s private collection)

INTRODUCTIONS

As we have seen above, not every adolescent diary begins with an invocation – for instance, several of the adolescents examined here started their diaries with an introduction preceding the first official diary entry. These introductory sections received different titles; for instance, Gyula Császár introduced himself and his family in a chapter titled *I*, as did Lilla Ecséri in 1944 who titled the section fulfilling the same function *Introduction*. Lilla Ecséri was born in 1928 in Budapest to a family of assimilated Jewish landholders and bankers that turned Roman Catholic during the World War II.

Lilla's and Gyula's introductions began by providing certain information, where Gyula first stated his birth place and date while Lilla gave a more precise description of her name: "My name is Lilla Aranka Kánitz⁷ from Ecsér, but my first name is Kamilla and my confirmation name is Magdolna." She then continues this official statement with an enumeration of other names: "They call me Ari in school and at home. But this is not all of them because I also have a ton of pet names and epithets" (Ecséri 7). In the case of Lilla's diary, one can observe a discursive playfulness characteristic of her entire diary and relatively uncommon in adolescent's diaries. She continues her introduction as follows: "My age: I will be 16 years old on June 30. (I'm way old.) My religion (which is the most important thing today): I'm currently Roman Catholic (recently), and not to my shame but unfortunately to my inconvenience, I'm of Jewish origin" (Ecséri 7).

There are several similarities between the diary of Gizella Somlay started in 1951 and Lilla Ecséri's diary beginning in 1944. In the first chapter, Lilla attempts to offer a genuine introduction by describing her own appearance and listing her most important interests, organized under subtitles such as *My Future Career*, *My Favorite Pastimes*, and last but not least, *About Boys* (Ecséri 7–8). Meanwhile Somlay's diary from 1951 begins as follows: "A huge, world-shaking event had to happen for me to pick up a pen and begin writing a diary. While this event may not have shaken the world, it had certainly shaken a lot of people – including me and my family – and it is no exaggeration when I say that it also ruined us" (Somlay 9). It appears that Gizella attempted to comply with external expectations by writing an introduction based on diaries she had read in the past; unfortunately however, we do not know what diaries she had read to come to the conclusion that diaries had to start with introductions. "Heaven knows why they [the author of the diary – G. K.] would do this [provide an introduction – G. K.] since diaries are usually written for one's own purposes, to fight against oblivion some day and refresh one's failing memory after several years, but in my opinion, no man or woman has ever had such a lapse of memory as to forget their own name" (Somlay 9). Gizella's idea of the diary as a collection of one's most personal records was incompatible with the requirements imposed by the outside world; nevertheless, she considered it important to follow the example provided by her previous reading despite her different views. This humorous entry demonstrates how she considered such introductions redundant, and her struggle to begin her diary in compliance with slightly forced rules is evidenced by the fact that she only provided the name, occupation and age of her family members with scarcely any further detail.

Similarly to the diaries discussed above, Lilla Ecséri's diary begins with a brief introduction but, unlike her peers, she describes her family tree

and numerous relations in greater detail. We can see from these introductory entries that Lilla had rather negative feelings towards her father as shown by the way she describes her mother's family tree extensively but only writes of her father's side in a single sentence without mentioning anyone by name. She is clearly complying with an unpleasant external obligation by recounting her paternal relations as she finishes by writing, "Thank God I'm done with my family tree..." (Ecséri 8). Just like Lilla, Gizella keeps her introductory entries concise and concludes them by writing: "I am done with the introduction, now for the story...", followed by a description of the day her family received the decision of their forced removal on June 6, 1951 (Somlay 9). While Gizella used her previous reading for inspiration, Lilla may have considered her preface similar to a school essay about herself and attempted to comply accordingly, albeit not very strictly as shown by the concluding sentence, "I think I have written enough of an introduction" (Ecséri 8).

Before I continue my analysis with diaries that begin with memoirs before their first official diary entry, it is important to briefly discuss a form of introduction uncommon in my present sample where the author of the diary explains the motives and circumstances behind the diary. For instance, in Klára Márkosi's diary started on Christmas⁸ 1944, the *Preface* (as she called it) begins as follows: "I have long wished to have a diary in which I could record my thoughts. Now I finally have one, but I have to write very sad things in it. Losing my home is already misery enough, but now the Russians are invading and we are going to a house under Swedish protection, in Úri street. We are losing our second home. – And so I will begin this sad diary." In Klára's case, the general example might have been the structure of printed books since she gives no indication of having followed the suggestions of her previous readings in writing a preface. In my analysis of different ways of beginning a diary, I have suggested that there may have been literary precedents to inspire and guide these adolescent authors, but we do not know of any concrete examples.

AB OVO, OR DIARIES BEGINNING WITH MEMOIRS

Schematically, diaries are often defined in contrast to memoirs (Alaszewski 12); however, this distinction is not easily applicable to adolescents' diary-writing practices. In several cases, the adolescent diaries analyzed in this paper begin with memoirs or *ab ovo*, providing an overview of the most important events from the birth of the author – or more rarely from the first meeting of the author's parents – until the day of the first official diary entry.

While Lilla Ecséri follows her introduction with an overview of her far-spread and numerous relations, Gyula Császár from early adolescence begins his diary by recalling his family's past from the very first meeting of his parents. It is probable that these stories of the parents' moving residence and their financial hardships have been told several times in the family circle if the son considers them crucial to his introduction. For instance, each time the family had moved, the boy gave a precise rundown of the new home including the house number and also stated their reasons for moving, as though this information served as a point of orientation to him in making sense of past events and organizing his own life into periods and stages. It is evident from Császár's introduction that the child attempts to provide a complete chronological overview in which he emphasizes his own individual development to reinforce a positive self-image. His educational achievements are especially important in this regard: "In fall of 1934, I began my "formal education" in the first grade of the elementary school on Hernád Street. Since I was a mischievous child, my parents did not expect good grades from me; however, my report cards always exceeded their expectations and shone with outstanding grades and honorary mentions. I maintained this high standard through all four grades of elementary school" (Császár 6). The boy describes his development until the present (the beginning of the diary), including previous milestones of his writing "career" in school and boy scout newspapers that clearly serve to prove his competence and talent suitable for a career in writing. The end of the period of personal development described is marked by emphasizing his own intellectual maturity and creativity: "We organized and executed trips, edited a paper called "Kölcsey Diák" [Kölcsey Student], but by that time, I had already seen and learned everything" (Császár 6). This self-evaluation is followed by a section titled *The World* in which he writes of the World War up until March 20 of 1942. Compared to the previous section, this rather short chapter contains a simple list of dates and previous important events of the war with the following conclusive remark: "There are great battles and great political checkmates right now and I await the results with great interest as I imagine how comfortable it will be to read this years from now and think back to these epic years" (Császár 8).

Béla Halász (pseudonym) was born in 1930 to a Jewish family. In 1944, Béla and his mother were deported to a labour camp near Vienna and managed to survive through the war. In the memoir which prefaces his diary, he writes of his memories of the Holocaust. His diary kept from 1948 is the most prominent example of an adolescent diary supplemented by memoirs, and it is worth comparing to Gyula Császár's self-evaluation and introduction, which he included in a chapter titled *I* while Halász

named the first chapter of the section fulfilling the same function *Light and Shadow*. In both cases, providing an overview of their previous life trajectory served as a supplement to an otherwise incomplete diary; however, not only do the two memoirs stand in sharp contrast in terms of length and structure, they are also fundamentally different in their choice of events to include in their life summaries, events that were so constitutive of these adolescents' lives that they considered it imperative to record them.

In both Gyula Császár and Béla Halász's case, the starting point in their memoirs was their own birth and the parts pertaining to their infant lives seem to have been influenced by the recollections of their families. For instance, Gyula often presents what he had probably heard from his parents as his own memories: "I have retained many small experiences in my memory from when I was one and a half years old. [...] One time I was walking out onto the porch of our house backwards when I suddenly tripped and fell into a tub full of water" (Császár 5). Similarly, Béla deemed it important to list information pertaining to him from his family's memories of himself: "That's how I was born. According to the witnesses, I was beautiful, well-developed and fat. I loved good breast milk, which I thankfully always had in abundance." However, despite this similarity, in Császár's case the focus of the narrative is on his own achievements and the documentation of his development, which serve to ensure him of his talents and perseverance. In other words, we see the narrative elements of an ordinary adolescent identity, while Halász's memoirs afford much deeper insights into his adolescent self-definition, which is primarily based on the Holocaust as personal trauma. Halász's diary consists of a single book split into volumes, chapters and "subchapters" and the title of the volume is *From Alpha to Omega*, from which we may conclude that the original plan of the diary author was to record his entire life trajectory. The first two chapters contain memoirs, the first one titled *Light and Shadow* while the other was titled *...The Life of Man Had Now Become Man's Own*, followed by a chapter titled *Present* that covers the period of the actual diary itself. The two memoir chapters before the first official diary entry are severed from one another by the child's liberation – in the first chapter, almost every subchapter contains the child's personal experiences of anti-Semitism, while the title of the second chapter refers to the end of these experiences, his return and escape from persecution. Unlike the memoirs of other adolescents, both chapters are comprised of several subchapters which split further into sections; for instance, in the first chapter's title, *Light* refers to the joys of family life and its initial unity while *Shadow* refers to the child's experiences of fascism. The chapter starts with the subchapter *A Life is Born*, in which Halász begins

his narrative by recording his birth. In contrast, the very next subchapters already contain references to anti-Semitism, such as memories of listening to the radio in *What Does "Uncle Lucifer" [Hitler – G. K.] Want?*, the discrimination and resulting financial difficulties of his family in *The Győr Speech⁹ and What Followed...*, and anti-Semitism at school in *The Jew and the Cockade*. Although the title of the second subchapter (*The Baby Walks... He Walks*) appears neutral in this regard, Halász does mention the spreading of fascism in parallel to his own development: "And the times progressed with me. And the times became worse. Dark clouds hang over the West. A great storm broke out in distant Germany. It may be that a volcano had erupted, for many, many thousands of German people's homes were threatened by destruction. Because they were Jews, or righteous, or Christians, devout Christians." In other words, the memoirs preceding the actual diary entries consist of enumerations of different traumas thematically organized into subchapters, where *The Triumph of Barbarism* describes the German occupation of Hungary and *In Exile* refers to the deportation of the family from Szolnok to Austria.

In Béla Halász's diary, the last subchapter of the first chapter of memoirs is titled in German *Die Russen marschieren in Dietrich Gasse!* and ends with the Russian occupation; however, the subsequent subchapters are also related to the child's experiences of trauma. He recounts the losses of the Hungarian Jewish community in the subchapter *A Few of the VICTIMS* and draws a parallel with the part *The Ones I Have Lost*, where he commemorates the death of seven family members including his father, uncles and cousins. As we can see, the primary theme of Halász's long memoirs is the most constitutive, identity-shaping trauma of his former life where the mostly age-specific priorities of adolescent diary author Gyula Császár are largely absent. However, recording his memories may have been more than a simple exercise in constructing a narrative of his life trajectory: it served as a testimony where he recorded events of his life for future generations with the authenticity of a witness, as evidenced by his exclamation at the end of the subchapter describing the deportation of his family: "Here is the evidence: JUDGE FOR YOURSELVES!"

DIARIES BEGINNING IN MEDIAS RES

As discussed in the previous section, the adolescent authors of diaries beginning *ab ovo* started their narratives with a memoir that ranged from the very beginning or the birth of the author to the date of the first official diary entry. This date was of exceptional importance to adolescent diary authors if it also coincided with their birthday; for instance, Margit

Molnár began to write her diary on her fourteenth birthday and her first entry recounts her purchase of a lace collar and a pair of black enamel shoes decorated with antelopes and eating liver paté served for this special occasion. She provides no retrospective preface or introduction other than writing, “I decided to start a diary when I turned fourteen years old. I begin”. Margit Molnár’s sister Judit was only nine years old when she began to keep a diary to follow her sister’s example and just like the older sister, she dispenses with the need for memoirs: “I now begin my first diary, and I have to write down rather sad news. Unfortunately, I am sick. I cannot go outside right now. I’m amusing myself with this so I don’t get bored. (Continued) Because I can only sit for now.” While in the case of certain adolescents, their parents had a direct or indirect influence on their child’s decision to keep a diary, Anna Szenes began to write diary entries at the suggestion of a literature teacher from Dombóvár as commemorated in the first entry of her third diary book. She was born in 1921 in Budapest to a middle-class assimilated Jewish family. Her first entry consisting of only a few lines was written in September 1934 and begins with a description of a summer spent with her relatives in Dombóvár without any invocation, preface or introduction (Szenes 52). It is interesting to note that *in medias res* diary structures seem to be less common than *ab ovo* diary structures; for example, the first entry of the first volume of Éva Kornássy’s diaries can be considered a mixture of the two where she describes the circumstances of the beginning of her diary-writing as follows: “I sit over my books, but I cannot study. I don’t know what had thrown me off.”

PERIODIC BEGINNINGS

Diary-writing is a periodical, time-centred activity (Lejeune 203–204) where dates and times are periodically repeated and certain events may appear multiple times over a longer period. One example would be the personal anniversaries of the diary author as well as the date of the first diary entry, which is commemorated by several diary authors every year, including Margit Molnár: “We are also celebrating [in February 1945 – G. K.], my little diary. It was exactly 4 years ago that I began to write a diary. It is a long time. So many things have happened since, how the world has changed. How well we had lived and oh God, how discontent I was regardless, how I wished for some variety. I didn’t realize back then how good, how splendid my life was.” Similarly, for many of the examined adolescents, the starting date of the diary was also the birthday of the diary author, which means that the birthday came to denote two events and two beginnings.

For the adolescent diary authors examined in this paper, the start of a new diary book was one of the most tangible measurements of the passage of time. While diary-writing has a single beginning evidenced by the *ab ovo* structure of certain diaries, each and every new diary book was also an opportunity for a new beginning, as articulated by Éva Kornássy at the start of her fourteenth diary book in 1944: “Éva! New book. And maybe a new period, just a little bit. Not sure, perhaps. You know how I love beginnings. The saying goes “omne principium difficile”, but I don’t really feel that way. Maybe the beginning really is hard, but it also has a huge advantage. It’s new. Oh, it’s a huge advantage indeed! Different than it was before and therefore interesting.” Another example is Anna Szenes, who wrote a lengthy preface in her new diary book started on October 2, 1936 where she summarized her goals as a diary author, even though she had never done so in previous diary books nor repeated this exercise at the conclusion or beginning of subsequent diary books. She draws a connection between her own development and filling the diary book as a tangible measurement of the passage of time: “And so I solemnly begin this diary with the conviction that I shall be an adult lady by the time I reach the end of it” (Szenes 73).

The first sentences of one of the diary books of Judit Molnár suggest that a new period beginning with a new diary book must be different from the previous period in its appearance, which illustrates the close connection of new diary books and new beginnings: “I have finally started a new book [in September 1956 – G. K.]. I was so tired of that big uncomfortable shape of yours oh Diary, may Allah¹⁰ draw your life as long as the thread of the silkworm and sustain you from the table of plenty like – me! I would love it if you were pretty, handsome and enviable.”

WHOM DOES THE DIARY ADDRESS? NARRATIVE METHODS OF INVOKING THE READER

In many cases, diary-writing is a form of fictive dialogue. As such, the diary author’s relationship with the dialogue partner – the imagined or real reader of the diary – may be described in the following ways: 1) the reader may be the adolescent author themselves; 2) the entries may be addressed to the grown-up adult self; 3) the author may be writing to a fictive, imagined person; 4) or to an actual, real person; or 5) there may be entries that address an actual person, but this person is not specified by name in the diary. It is important to note that invoking the reader in the majority of the adolescent diaries examined here cannot be described in such simple terms as suggested above, due to the fact that the author’s

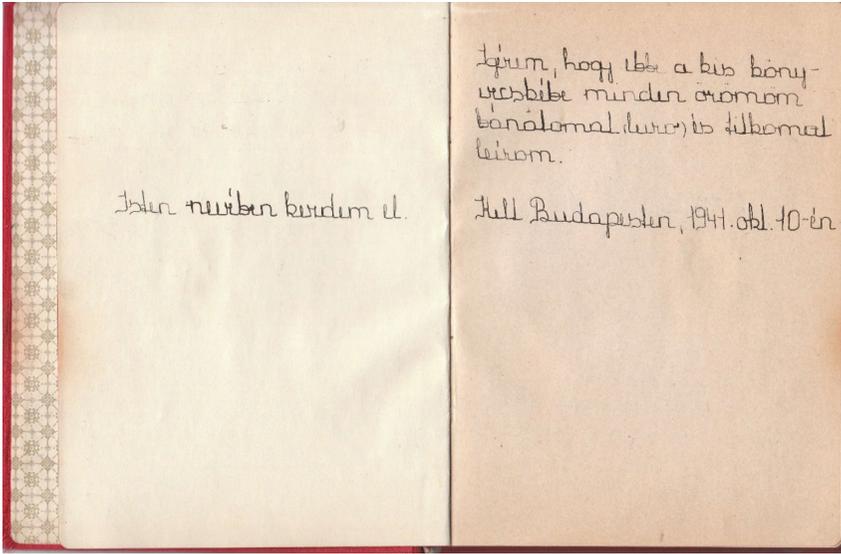
idea of the reader or dialogue partner may change in the course of years of diary-writing and in accordance with the changing goals of the diary author.

In certain cases examined in this paper, we may speak of an assumed or real reader in instances where the diary author either presupposes that their texts may fall into other people's hands or specifically intend their diaries for public consumption. This is not stated explicitly in every text – some of the diary authors express the exact opposite at a rhetorical level by emphasizing that they are only writing to themselves. However, one may presume from the way diary authors explain self-evident relations (such as relatives) or explicitly name certain persons who are obviously known to the author that these diary authors did consider the possibility that strangers may read their writing, which then compelled them to fulfill the imagined expectations of such strangers.

In the case of Gizella Somlay, we have previously noted how she considered it important to write her diary for herself despite the fact that she still attempted to fulfill a variety of imagined expectations such as the provision of an introduction. At the beginning, she writes her diary for herself and explicitly expresses this when she finds out her mother has read her entries: "A diary isn't written for others to read, even if that other happens to be one's mother. I feel she had no right. A diary is the most personal thing in the world. People write things in it that they hardly even dare tell themselves let alone other people" (Somlay 37). However, the fact that the adolescent author of the diary describes certain situations humorously does presuppose an imagined or real reader (who may of course coincide with the author themselves), otherwise entries that aim to entertain the reader would become meaningless. In this regard, we see a slow transformation process in Gizella's diary where the entries she had once written specifically for herself are now being written for the public; however, there is little to no mention of this undefined, imagined outside reader. The above mentioned process becomes complete in an instance where she explicitly warns the reader not to misunderstand certain parts in her text: "Before the dear reader might be moved to tears by such enormous generosity, it is my duty to inform them that in the case of one pot egg barley, "sharing the last bite" does by no means merit such softened feelings" (Somlay 44–45).

DIARY-WRITING AS SELF-DIALOGUE

In the cases examined above, diary-writing functions as an act of fictive communication. In rare instances, adolescent authors may hint at



The first page of Éva Weinmann's diary from 1934 was published in 2004.
(The original in the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archive, Budapest
Reference code: HU HJA XX-F-45)

the reader of the diary but do not explicitly name said reader, while in other cases, entries may be specifically addressed to a reader. However, it is unclear from the current examples whom we should consider to be the communicative partner; we may only talk of the reader of the diary at a rhetorical level as the majority of adolescent authors consider the reader to be a virtual communicative partner. In this regard, the issue of who this diary dialogue partner might be remains unresolved, along with the questions: *Who should we imagine behind the diary? Who is the communicative partner?* The only diary in my sample that may provide an answer to this question is the diary of Éva Kornássy.

Regarding the issue of the reader, one of the most frequent cases in diaries is where the person of the author coincides with the person of the reader – in other words, the author writes the text for themselves as a form of self-dialogue. However, in the case of adolescent diaries, we may talk of a different version of this phenomenon where the adolescent author intends their early writing to an adult self. At first glance, the third sentence of Éva Kornássy's first diary book seems similar to the ones discussed above where the dialogue occurs between the diary author and

the personified diary: "I want to be completely honest, I want you to know me." However, one day later on January 10, 1940, she explicitly states what diary-writing means to her: "I think you know why I'm writing a diary." This already diverges from the above example that could be described with the equation $You = Diary$ since she does not personify the diary itself: it remains an object. "Not so I could pour my heart out, to cry about my sorrows and fantasize, and daydream. No!" It is a common contradiction of adolescent diaries that they deny certain "lowly" goals; nevertheless, reading the diary books reinforces the exact opposite in the reader, which is also the case here where Éva's writing almost exclusively revolves around her own feelings. She continues as follows: "I want you to remember me. "Nosce te ipsum!" as it is written at the temple in Delphi. But I also want you to know others through me, even if I am not your average person who can help you get far. Maybe someday you'll need to see into the feelings of a person or child (whichever you prefer)." One may see from the second person singular case that this is a dialogue and the diary is specifically written to an undefined reader or person, while at the same time this imagined or real reader is looking back to the past from the present as suggested by "*remember me*" in the excerpt above. This interpretation is supported by the fact that this particular case does not involve the personification of the diary itself, as well as by the appearance of the Latin proverb *Nosce te ipsum!* on the first page, as if it hailed the reader and diarist to *Know thyself!*

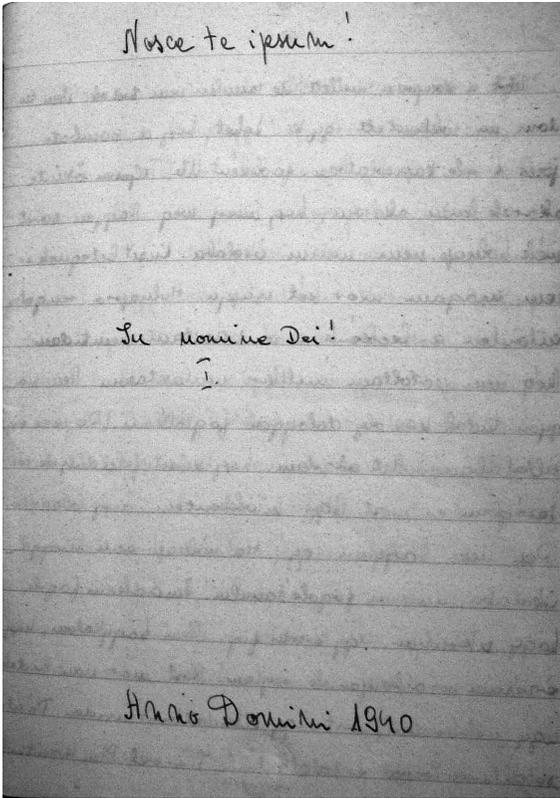
Personalization is highly unsystematic in the sources discussed in the previous section but can be found in almost every entry written by Éva Kornássy. For instance, a few weeks after the entry examined above, Éva experiments with different writing styles and attaches the following commentary: "I can't really write to you, maybe later. What do you think of this handwriting? I can write a lot of ways, you know. But I think this might be the best." An entry written one week later in mid-February 1940 further illuminates the intended future reader: "Shall I tell you more? Do you like to listen? If only you could answer so many things! Is everything the way I imagined it would be? Or does every youthful dream drown in the ocean of life? Do you perform surgeries or teach? I know how you write. Do you travel? Are you still drawn to unknown lands? Mountains, seas and Italian cities! And Athens! Do you like ancient civilizations? Philosophy? Do you still love it when the flowing river of life is roaring, running, pulsing unstopably? Do you like fighting against the tide? Do you like to party and laugh, do you like to read?" In my analysis of the imagined reader, I have mentioned before that certain adolescent diary authors write their entries to a grown-up self; similarly, the excerpt examined here is indication that the future reader is intended to be the "adult Éva" and these

questions are addressed to her. The questions pertain to topics that are of particular interest to the adolescent author (such as future career) and are linked by the underlying question of how much does this “teen Éva” correspond to the “adult Éva.” This assumption is supported by a later part of this same entry: “You probably won’t benefit from it beyond knowing your old thoughts. Knowing the grade V high-schooler you once were.” The diary consists of almost twenty diary books; however, very few entries name so explicitly the person being addressed by Éva’s diary that she had kept for seven years.

While the majority of examined adolescent diary authors only address the adult self at a rhetorical level as a literary device, Éva Kornássy makes a conscious attempt in almost every entry to write to her imagined serious, mature adult self and engage in fictive dialogue, which means that the exclamation at the beginning of the diary books acquires a double meaning. On the one hand, it is a clear indication to the adolescent author that the diary serves as a means of self-cognition; on the other hand, *Nosce te ipsum!* at the beginning of the diary books also hails the adult reader since the adolescent had written her diary as an opportunity for the older self to learn about her younger self and thereby be able to understand and trace her own development and transformation.

In the diary of Éva Kornássy, numerous entries begin by self-address, such as Éva, Eve, Evchen, Little Kori, Little Kory and so on. In light of the entries examined above, we may thus distinguish between the *author* (who writes the diary) and the self reflected upon by the author. However, the two are not identical in these entries; the addressee is not the author but the *adolescent self* that the author attempts to discover and accurately describe, which explains why the names created from her first and last names often change in the diary. We may also talk of the adult Éva to whom she addressed a variety of questions and observed the imagined needs of this adult self in the course of writing; however, this older self is not given an actual name. Éva Kornássy also anticipated that her “adult self” might not remember several things from her adolescent years and therefore attempted to describe events she considered important in greater detail: “You might not remember who that is anymore. It’s Iluci K.’s fiancée. God knows what you might know of her, whose wife she is. So, since I only know this much so far, I am writing to let you know that he was the victim of a car accident and was buried yesterday.”

As we can see above, Éva Kornássy’s diaries are a form of self-dialogue in which the author of the diary is engaged in conversation with their “teen” and imagined “adult” selves and reflects upon her “adolescent self” as a mirror of her current self. The names may change in this self-dialogue but the two “communicative partners” can be clearly traced, and



The first page of Éva Kornássy's diary from 1940.

Thanks to the Budapest City Archives for the permission to publish.

Reference code: XIII. 41. Sz.

we may also assume a fictive reader beyond the “adult self” to whom Éva writes her entire diary.¹¹

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I examined the narrative rites of adolescent diaries by analyzing the writing of twelve authors in order to discern the technical and narrative elements used in the course of diary-writing. While the analysis did not yield general patterns characteristic of each chosen diary, we may

nevertheless speak of a narrative repertoire selectively drawn upon by adolescent authors. What, then, are the main elements of this repertoire?

In several instances, adolescent diaries begin with an invocation in which the author either calls upon God or writes down God's name first; however, adolescent diaries also diverge significantly from diaries written by adults in two different ways. One is the provision of an introduction where the author not only introduces themselves but also their entire family and immediate environment, and the other is starting the diary *ab ovo* by including a memoir that summarizes the most important events of the period between the birth of the author and the beginning of the diary, which would enable a consistently kept diary to cover the author's entire life trajectory. In contrast, adult diaries are largely devoid of a preface; the majority of these begin with the events, experiences and thoughts of the first day of diary-writing. Another general ritual of diary-writing in the case of diaries consisting of several books is treating the first page of the new diary book as symbolic of a new beginning for the authors.

Several of the examined adolescent authors consider diary-writing as dialogue or fictive communication. However, the overwhelming majority of adolescents only invoke the reader of the diary on a rhetorical level, who is often considered a virtual communicative partner. Similarly, most of these adolescents only express and observe the purpose of writing their entries for their adult selves in a few select entries; in other words, it is not a consistent ritual in their everyday writing practices. Nevertheless, while the use of narrative tropes suggesting an ongoing dialogue between the author and their future adult self is exceptionally rare, addressing their adult selves is an important characteristic of adolescent diaries.

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NOTES

- 1 BFL (= Budapest City Archives.) XIII. 41. Sz.
- 2 OSZK (=National Széchényi Library, Budapest.) QH 3171.
- 3 In accordance with the Hungarian Act on the Protection of Personal Data, the authors of privately owned and/or unpublished diaries and any family members mentioned were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. In addition to changing their names, information about the author's town of residence is also obscured.

- 4 Her diary was published in 2004 on the 60th anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust.
- 5 Her diary, kept between 1934 and 1946 and comprised of three thick volumes, was found in 2012 discarded during a clearance in Budapest.
- 6 On the top of the first page appears *Nosce te ipsum!* and on the middle of the page stands *In nomine Dei!* and at the bottom of the page she wrote the date, e.g. *Anno Domini 1940*.
- 7 The original surname of Lilla's family was Kánitz. Although Lilla's father 'Hungarized' his surname from the German-sounding Kánitz to Ecséri in 1919, his daughter still named herself in her diary with the original family name: Lilla Kánitz.
- 8 Her parents were a contributing factor in their daughter's decision to write a diary as evidenced by her precise enumeration of Christmas presents that the diary also included. There are numerous cases (not discussed here) supporting the idea that presenting children with diaries was part of Hungarian and Austrian gift culture (see Gerhalter 57–58).
- 9 Kálmán Darányi, the prime minister of Hungary (1936–1938) announced a planned Anti-Jewish Law in his speech in Győr in March 1938. The first Anti-Jewish Law was urged and prepared by Darányi, but it was defined as law after Béla Imrédy became prime minister in May 1938. In Béla Halász's diary, Darányi's speech in Győr appears as the starting point of Anti-Semitism in Hungary (Ladányi 103–104).
- 10 The Roman Catholic Judit Molnár makes a humorous diary entry by mentioning the name of Allah – without any religious affiliations. Possibly, her knowledge about the Islam culture is the result of the Hungarian literary education, namely the novel titled *Egri csillagok*, which was a mandatory reading in the secondary school. The novel is about the siege of Eger and it is a tribute to the victory of the Hungarian Christian troops over the Turks in 1552.
- 11 The intentions expressed by Éva Kornássy above are also articulated by other adolescent diary authors; however, narrative tropes alluding to a dialogue between the adolescent author and the adult reader are relatively scarce in the other diaries examined here. One example is the diary of Judit Molnár: *I would really love this little diary to be nice and sophisticated, but I just can't write that way. When I read it from the beginning, I realized what nonsense I had written. But at least it will serve the purpose that, if the good Lord gives me life and I grow up, I may take it out and reread it to look back into the past and remember the small events that happened in my little life.* Similarly, Lilla Ecséri also assumed she would reread her writing as a grandmother: *I write my diary because it will bring me entertainment in my old age and will help me to write "the great novel of my life" (Ecséri 18).* This seemed to be a general sentiment among diary authors as evidenced by the fact that fourteen-year-old Sára Nagy in Pécs articulated the same wish in 1934: *I keep this diary so that when I am a big girl, I could once again relive the moments I am writing or scribbling down here in my wonderful handwriting. Unfortunately, these moments are very mixed, there are more bad things than good ones. And besides, I will only see later when I read my diary again what sort of child I was back then.* However, aside from these singular instances, these authors did not seem to observe the purpose of the diary in the course of their daily writing, leaving no other trace of the intention to write their entries for an adult self as opposed to the explicit mentions of the previously examined Éva Kornássy. In other words, these adolescents make no references to an older self beyond articulating the above mentioned purpose of the diary.