"an exceedingly ordinary thing":

An introduction to history and consciousness in *A Book of Memories* by P�ter N�das and *Anamnesis* by Eric Voegelin.

"A novel is an exceedingly ordinary thing:

it wades through lived experience"

\u0000 P\u0000ter N\u0000das43 44**[1]**

I cannot rid myself of the idea \u0000 in this age of non-fiction and real news if not real TV \u0000 that literature, specifically the novel, helps us understand ourselves as human beings living in the twenty-first century and heirs to our past.. Nor can I rid myself of the idea that Eric Voegelin\u0000s philosophical work is first and foremost a work of literary criticism that relies upon the

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43 [1] P\u0000ter N\u0000das, "The Novelist and His Selfs," *The New Hungarian Quarterly* 33, no. 127 (1992): 18.

exercise of imaginative re-enactment and is simultaneously an imaginative articulation of his experience of that reality in which we find ourselves as human beings. There seems to me to be ample evidence to support these assertions, especially the latter.45 [2]

Literature was important in several ways to Voegelin: he often cited the importance of writers like Stephen George, James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Paul Val�ry as formative influences upon his thinking; he used the novels of Canetti, Cervantes, Doderer, Dostoevsky, Mann, Musil as tools for understanding the nature of modernity; and from time to time � mostly in private correspondence where he could comment upon specific works as an amateur � he would propose readings and interpretations of writers like Shakespeare and Henry James.46 [3] Since he remarked in a December 1955

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45 [2] In addition to Voegelin's own work, others have written on Voegelin's philosophy in ways that emphasize the storytelling dimensions of his work. Among these I think quickly of Paul Caringella, "Voegelin: Philosopher of Divine Presence," and Lewis P. Simpson, "Voegelin and the Story of the Clerks," in Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Eric Voegelin's Significance for the Modern Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), and Thomas W. Heilke, "Order, Narrative, and Consciousness," in *Eric Voegelin: In Quest of Reality* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 29-63

46 [3] Specifically in three letters to Robert B. Heilman, Voegelin commented on *King Lear* and *Othello* by way of providing commentary on a early draft of Heilman's *This Great Stage* and on the publication of *Magic in the Web*. Of course, his letter on James's *Turn of the Screw* first sent to Heilman privately in 1947 was later

letter to his literary critic friend Robert B. Heilman that ❖literary criticism is one of my permanent occupations,❖47 [4] it seems obvious that by studying his work we can learn not only his methods for reading texts critically, but also extend his work ❖ through the reading of literature ❖ in ❖the great dialogue that goes through the centuries among men about their nature and destiny.❖48 [5] In fact, in the same letter to Heilman he asserts that ❖The occupation with works of art, poetry, philosophy, mythical imagination, and so forth, makes sense only, if it is conducted as an inquiry into the nature of man.❖49 [6]

If I survey the novels Voegelin used in his own work, I am struck by the fact that for the most part he sees modern novels as examinations of how writers have experienced, explored and articulated deformations of consciousness. Indeed if we are to believe Milan Kundera, the novel has accompanied modern man since the

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published with the important ❖Postscript: On Paradise and Revolution❖ in *The Southern Review* , Winter 1979. These letters appear in the order I❖ve listed them in Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, box 17, folder 9, April 9, 1946; July 24, 1956; and August 22, 1956. And in Robert B. Heilman Papers, Manuscripts, Special Collections and Archives, University of Washington, Accession 1000-14, box 1, folder 2, November 13, 1947.

47 [4] Eric Voegelin to Robert B. Heilman, December 19, 1955, Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, box 17, folder 9.

48 [5] Eric Voegelin to Robert B. Heilman, August 22, 1956, Voegelin Papers, Hoover, box 17, folder 9.

49 [6] Ibid.

inception of modernity; he writes: ﷺThe novel has accompanied man uninterruptedly and faithfully since the beginning of the Modern Era. It was then that the ﷺpassion to know,ﷺ which Husserl considered the essence of European spirituality, seized the novel and led it to scrutinize manﷺs concrete life and protect it against ﷺthe forgetting of beingﷺ. . . .ﷺ50 [7] If one of the primary components of modernity is the deformation of consciousness inflicted upon human beings by other human beings intent upon ﷺstalling the continual delicate vacillations of reality,ﷺ51 [8] then the novel may very well be a literary form that was created to communicate the human experiences of deforming and deformation. In this case, ﷺform and contentﷺwould be inseparable.ﷺ52 [9] The general questions that interest me most at this point, despite the fact that I cannot deal with them here, are: Can the novel form be used to explore and articulate the experience of consciousness undeformed by adherence to

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50 [7] Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 5.

51 [8] Heimito von Doderer, wrote: ﷺPeople who wished to see the rigid concrete channels of their lives extended into the infinite future were in fact doing nothing but stalling the continual delicate vacillations of reality. And the moment that vibrant equilibrium was halted, a second reality came into being. . . .ﷺ in Heimito von Doderer, *The Demons*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 1237.

52 [9] Eric Voegelin to Robert B. Heilman, August 13, 1964, Robert B. Heilman Papers, Manuscripts, Special Collections and Archives, University of Washington, Accession 1000-5-90-19, box 3, folder 6.

rigid ideological principles [?] or even in opposition to these ideological principles [?] that are external to the experiences that compel human beings to write novels? Are there novels that achieve this? Can the novel form contain and/or rely upon anamnetic experiments similar or identical to those we find in *Anamnesis*?53 [10] Are there such novels? Can the novel form contain meditations on consciousness similar to that of Voegelin in Part III of *Anamnesis*? Can explications and explorations of deformation in novels point beyond themselves to or remain open to the recovery of balance of consciousness?

Voegelin[?]s statement in his lecture-essay on the German university that [?]the great works of literature are direct confrontations with the estrangement [from reality] [?] they discover it as a phenomenon, they are expressions of suffering from it, they work through the problem meditatively in order to penetrate to the freedom of the spirit. But they are not yet created out of freedom[?]54 [11] leads us to think that we may be able to answer some of the preceding questions [?] at least tentatively [?] in the affirmative. I have chosen in this paper to work on the storyteller Eric Voegelin,

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53 [10] Eric Voegelin, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 6, *Anamnesis*, ed. David Walsh, trans. M. J. Hanak, Gerhard Niemeyer, et. al. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002). Hereinafter referred to as *Anamnesis* in the text.

54 [11] Eric Voegelin, [?]The German University and the Order of German Society: A Reconsideration of the Nazi Era,[?] in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, *Published Essays, 1966-1985*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 27.

philosopher, and the storyteller P�ter N�das, novelist. I think that the juxtaposition of these two types of storytellers, in general, and these two storytellers, in particular, is justified by the approach that each takes in their storytelling. I focus this brief paper on how and whether *A Book of Memories*55 [12] by P�ter N�das engages the philosophical questions and meditations in Voegelin�s *Anamnesis*. Is *A Book of Memories* created out of �the freedom of the spirit� or does it only diagnose the disease of the spirit? And if *A Book of Memories* is not created out of �the freedom of the spirit,� does it engage us in such a way as to point beyond itself and guide its readers into �the freedom of the spirit�?

The first principle of literary criticism according to Voegelin is the critical reader�s submission to the authority of the writer. Responding to Heilman�s dedication of his book on *Othello*, *Magic in the Web*, to him, Voegelin writes:

> The interpretation of a literary work by a first-rate artist or philosopher must proceed on the assumption that the man �knew� what he was doing ? leaving in suspense the question of the level of consciousness at which the �knowing� in the concrete instance occurs. Under that assumption the interpretation will be adequate only, if every �part� of the work makes sense in the comprehensive context. Moreover, the sense must emerge from the texture of the linguistic corpus, and it must not be prejudged by �ideas� of the interpreter. No adequate interpretation of a major work is possible,

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55 [12] P�ter N�das, *A Book of Memories*, translated by Ivan Sanders with Imre Goldstein (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997). Hereafter referred to in the text as *Memories*.

> unless the interpreter assumes the role of the disciple who has everything to learn from the master.56 [13]

My first principle then, in trying penetrate to the meanings of *A Book of Memories*, has been submission to the master, P�ter N�das. Although the book projected N�das on to the stage of European literature with publications in German (1991), English (1997) and French (1998) quickly following its Hungarian publication in 1986, and although reviewers, like Jane Perlez who remarked that "His work has evoked comparisons to the poetic traditions of Thomas Mann, the sexual explicitness of Jean Genet, and the stream-of-consciousness of James Joyce,"57 [14] have repeatedly placed N�das in the company of the great European novelists, I cannot completely submit myself to such a master since it may turn out that he is not a master after all. Submission to the master in the case of *A Book of Memories* is difficult, however, for quite other reasons: the novel�s subject matter and complexity � its length and its themes � its breadth and its beauty � all require the reader to be wary of such a master. Moreover, if I submit to the authority of the text in this case I may be seduced into silence, I will not have a paper and will, therefore, be forced into the expediency of only reading beautiful passages from the novel followed by: �There,

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56 [13] Eric Voegelin to Robert B. Heilman. July 24, 1956. Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, box 17, folder 9.

57 [14] *New York Times*, September 9, 1997, �C, pp. 9-10.

don�t you see.� So I cannot submit fully to the authority of the master, and since I must exercise some critical faculty in order to avoid the aforementioned seduction, I shall begin with what must stand as a general introduction to and �summary� of the novel.

A *Book of Memories* is a long and difficult philosophical novel that focuses the reader�s attention upon the erotic sensualism of all the novel�s narrators as well as the relation � by juxtaposition � of that eroticism to the social structure and order of the family and the political order of the Communist regimes of M�ty�s R�kosi (1949-1953? Or 56?) and J�nos K�d�r (1956-197?) in Hungary. The novel is difficult to summarize because of its complex structure that relies upon three narrative strands that initially appear to be narrated by three different narrators. Moreover, these narrative strands are alternated in the organization of chapters so that one can follow each story by remembering the story line three chapters back as one begins a new chapter. In order to keep these narrative strands sorted, I assigned the letters A, B, C to the three narratives and then wrote in the Table of Contents by each chapter title A1, B1, C1, A2, etc.58 [15] One must be cautious however in doing this for C6 while it concerns the characters of the C narrative is narrated by a new narrator � an adult who appears as a child in the story narrated by the C strand; thus, I designate C6

58 [15] See Appendix I.

as C6'. More on this later. The novel contains nineteen chapters which result in the following: Seven chapters for Narrative A; six chapters for Narrative B, five chapters for pure Narrative C and one chapter for Narrative C6'. Finally, we learn from the penultimate chapter of the novel ☐ the last part of the C narrative with the changed with narrator ☐ that Narrator A and Narrator C are the same. If, however, we do not read the book in one night, but twice instead, as N☐das suggests we need to do,59 [16] we would notice from time to time in the A narrative references to earlier episodes of the narrator☐s life, episodes that have ☐ by that point in the novel ☐ already been recounted in Narrative C.

In C6', the narrator, Kriszti☐n Somi T☐t, tells us that he has found the entire manuscript of the book ☐ all the chapters except his own ☐ after the mysterious death of the man we now know as the narrator of both the A and C narrations and as Kriszti☐n☐s friend from the first chapter of the novel. The narrator Kriszti☐n introduces his chapter entitled ☐No More☐ by writing:

> I am a rational man, perhaps too rational. I am not inclined to any form of humility. Still, I would like to copy my friend☐s last sentence onto this empty page. Let it help me finish the job no one☐s commissioned me to do, which should make it the most personal undertaking of my life, the one closest to my heart.
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> *It was a dark, foggy winter night, and of course I couldn☐t see anything*.

59 [16] *New York Times*, September 9, 1997, ☐C, p. 9, col. 5.

> I don&#65533;t think he meant this to be his last sentence. There is every indication that the next day, as usual, he would have continued his life with a new sentence, one that could not be predicted or inferred from the notes he left behind. Because the novel of a life, once begun, always offers an invitation: Come on, lose yourselves in me, trust me, in the end I may be able to lead you out of my wilderness.
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> My role is merely a reporter. (*Memories*, 592.)

The narrator of A and C is a novelist and has been writing &#65533; in the house of Kriszti&#65533;n&#65533;s aunts in the countryside, the house to which Kriszti&#65533;n brought him upon finding him destitute at the Budapest airport &#65533; his memoirs and his novel. Kriszti&#65533;n writes that he has organized his friend&#65533;s manuscript after a long study of his outlines and notes, but has found &#65533;one additional, sketchy chapter, a fragment really, that I could not place anywhere. It doesn&#65533;t appear in any of the repeatedly revised tables of contents. Yet he may have meant it to be the keystone of the whole story.&#65533; (*Book of Memories*, 681.)

&#65533;But what of the story?&#65533; you may ask. The opening chapter, &#65533;The Beauty of My Anomalous Nature,&#65533; is set in Berlin &#65533; East Berlin we find out later &#65533; and begins with a description of the last place A. lived there. As A. begins to talk about his &#65533;last place,&#65533; he reflects:

> Certainly I don&#65533;t want to write a travel journal; I can describe only what is mine, let&#65533;s say the story of my loves, but maybe not even that, since I don&#65533;t think I could ever talk about the larger significance of mere personal experiences, and since I don&#65533;t believe or, more precisely, don&#65533;t know, whether there is anything more significant than

> these otherwise trivial and uninteresting personal experiences (I assume there can't be), I'm ready to compromise; *let this writing be a kind of recollection or reminder, something bound up with the pain and pleasure of reminiscence, something one is supposed to write in old age, a foretaste of what I may feel forty years from now, if I live to be seventy-three and can still reminisce.*
>
> My cold throws everything into sharp relief; it would be a shame to miss the opportunity. (*Memories*, 3-4. Italics added.)

We learn thus that the narrator is now thirty-three and writing his memoirs. While A. is in Berlin he is also writing a novel, and when he meets Melchior Thoenissen, a poet, through an actress named Thea Sandstuhl, the primary storyline of the A narration is established. The narrator falls in love with Melchior who is also loved by Thea. Melchior and the narrator have an affair that ends with Melchior escaping East Germany and the narrator returning to Hungary destitute and bereft because he could not sustain a viable relationship with Melchior (and besides his visa to the German People's Republic expired). The narrator, however, believes that Thea can only relate to Melchior through him and thus finds it necessary, as this conduit that binds together the relationship, to consummate a sexual liaison with Thea.

The unsustainable relationship with Melchior does provide A. with characters for the novel that he is writing Narrative B. Narrator B, the narrator of the novel narrator A. is writing, is named Thomas Thoenisssen and his fianc'e and later wife is named Helene. Helene is also the name of Melchior's mother and there is some hint that Thomas Thoenissen, who lived in Germany during the Second Reich (1871-1918) is Melchior's grandfather. Thomas Thoenissen, the B narrator, intersperses his own

story of leaving his fianc&#65533;e, Helene, to go to Heiligendamm &#65533; ostensibly to be able to work on his novel &#65533; with his recollections of coming to Heiligendamm with his parents late in the 19th century. Once in Heiligendamm Thomas recalls the times he spent here as a child with his parents. He remembers, however, in a particularly graphic way, the night he and his mother caught his father and a Fr&#65533;ulein Nora Wohlgast (a resort guest staying in the room next to the Thoenissens) *in flagrante dēlictō*. It is apparent to the reader that Thomas&#65533;s father has, however, been carrying on an affair with Fr&#65533;ulein Wohlgast. The event of this recollection will later be reflected in a recollection of Narrator C. Both Thomas's narration and the novel he is writing while at Heiligendamm are, of course(?), A.'s novel!

The C narration, written I remind you when the narrator is thirty-three, focuses upon C.&#65533;s adolescence and young adulthood in Hungary of the 1950&#65533;s. Although it is not the most important narrative &#65533; all the narratives are ultimately equally important for the novel &#65533; I will devote more space to its summary and to its explication because it contains the earliest recollections in the novel and because it is the most overtly political narrative. C.'s father, Theodor Thoenissen, is a Stalinist state prosecutor in the Communist regime of M&#65533;ty&#65533;s R&#65533;kosi; C. refers to him mostly as Father. C. does not provide us the Christian names of his other family members who include his mother (always referred to as Mother), his sister, and his maternal grandmother and grandfather &#65533; referred to only as Grandmother and

Grandfather) ◆ in whose house they live. For the most part C. tells us the story of his adolescence by emphasizing (1) the exploits of and relationships among his circle of friends which includes three girls ◆ H◆di Sz◆n, Livia S◆li, and Maja Prihoda ◆ and three boys ◆ Kriszti◆n Somi T◆t, K◆lman Cs◆zdi (who died October 23, 1956 during the popular demonstrations in Budapest), and Pr◆m, and (2) his relationship with his father and mother. This story line begins with the third chapter entitled ◆The Soft Light of the Sun,◆ and it recounts an encounter between C. and Kriszti◆n. C. is walking home alone from school through the woods on a spring day when the snow is melting. Kriszti◆n appears in the woods and they walk toward each other. The narrator◆s feelings for Kriszti◆n are apparent in the following passage:

> from the moment I had spotted him behind the bushes I had to sort out, and also alert, my most contradictory and secret feelings: ◆Kriszti◆n!◆ I would have loved to cry out . . . [but] saying his name out loud would be like touching his naked body, which is why I avoided him, always waiting until he began walking home with others so I wouldn◆t walk with him or his way; even in school I was careful not to wind up next to him, lest I◆d have to talk to him or, in a sudden commotion, brush against his body; at the same time I kept watching him, tailed him like a shadow, mimicked his gestures in front of the mirror, and it was painfully pleasurable to know that *he was completely unaware of my spying on him*; . . . in reality, he didn◆t even bother to look at me, I was like a neutral, useless object to him, completely superfluous and devoid of interest.
>
> Of course, my sober self cautioned me not to acknowledge these passionate feelings; *it was as if two separate beings coexisted in me, totally independent of each other*: at time the joys and sufferings his mere existence caused me seemed like nothing but little games, not worth thinking about, because *one of*

> *my two selves hated and detested him as much as my other self loved and respected him*. . . . (*Memories*, 39-40. Emphases added.)

Kriszti□n had arranged this t□te-□-t□te in the woods to ask C. not to report him to the principal for a derogatory remark about Stalin that C. had overheard him make in the school toilet. The remark increased A.□s psychic burden because Grandfather had also made a derogatory remark about the plan to embalm Stalin□s body for public display on the same day, i.e., the day of Stalin□s funeral. C.□s encounter with Kriszti□n ends by C. shouting □It never occurred to me to do it, believe me!□ And in answer to Kriszti□n□s □No?□ whispered □No, not at all.□ At this point C. impetuously kissed Kriszti□n. While C. remembers that the kiss □was very sensual□ it was nevertheless

> free □ of any ulterior motives with which adult love, in its own natural way, complements a kiss; *our mouths*, in the purest of possible ways, and regardless of what had gone before or what would follow, *restricted themselves to what two mouths in the fraction of a second could give each other: fulfillment, comfort, and release*; and that□s when I must have closed my eyes, in that instant when no sight or circumstance could possibly have mattered anymore; when I think about that moment now, I still must ask myself whether a kiss can be anything else or anything more than that? (*Memories*, 47.60 [17] Emphasis added.)

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60 [17] Kriszti□n, the receiver of the kiss and the reporter of the penultimate chapter of the novel, recalls the kiss: □What should be understood from all this is that no event in my later life could induce me to think that that kiss was really a kiss and not simply the solution to an existential problem I had at the time. I couldn□t allow myself to be caught up in dangerous psychological predicaments, I had all I could do to ward off tangible external dangers. I came to appreciate the advantages

They part, C. walks home, sees a strange coat on the halltree, but enters his mother's room anyway — by this time his mother who is sick with cancer (a truth that has been hidden from C. by his family) and stays in bed most of the time — there to encounter a stranger who had earlier disappeared from the family's lives. Later, we find out that the man visiting C.'s mother is J[illegible]nos Hamar, former friend of his father and mother, who is returning from a five-year prison term.

In the chapter entitled "Grass Grew over the Scorched Spot," Narrator C writes that "a not insignificant detail of our emotional life was the fact that, as a result of our parents' political trustworthiness, we were privileged to live adjacent to the immense, heavily guarded area that contained the residence of M[illegible]tyas R[illegible]kosi" and that "the whole protected area became something like a focal point, the living nucleus of all my fears." (*Memories*, 270 and 271.)

When C. refers to "*our* parents' political trustworthiness," he is referring primarily to his adolescent friend Maja Prihoda's father, chief of military counter-intelligence, and his own father, a state prosecutor, whom sometimes work together.

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of psychological self-concealment, and with the years I continued to avoid ambiguous situations and judgments that didn't square exactly with my wishes or interests." *Memories*, 594.

Maja and C. agree to cooperate with each other in conducting regular periodic searches of their fathers' desks in order to determine if they may be traitors in which case they would denounce them to the authorities. C. writes:

> We were not aware of what we were doing to each other and to ourselves; in the interest of our stated goal we didn't want to acknowledge that as a result of our activity a feeling was forming, like some tough stain or film, a deposit on the lining of our hearts, stomachs, and intestines; we did not want to acknowledge the feeling of repulsion.
>
> Because it wasn't just official and work-related documents that we came across but all sorts of other material that we did not mean to find, like our parents' extensive personal romantic correspondence; here, the material discovered in my father's drawers was unfortunately more serious, but once we put our hands on it and went over it thoroughly, painstakingly, with the disinterested sternness of professionals, it seemed that by ferreting out sin in the name of ideal purity, invading the most forbidden territory of the deepest and darkest passions, penetrating the most secret regions, we, too, turned into sinners, for sin is indivisible: when tracking a murderer one must become a murderer to experience most profoundly the circumstances and motives of the murder; and so we were right there with our fathers, where not only should we not have set foot but, according to the testimony of the letters, they themselves moved about stealthily, like unrepentant sinners.
>
> There is profound wisdom in the Old Testament's prohibition against casting eyes on the uncovered loins of one's father. (*Memories*, 341.)

The letters unearthed by Maja and C. reveal that Maja's father is continuing an affair thought to have been ended some time earlier by Maja's mother; thus, Maja becomes an unwitting and unwilling accomplice in her father's deception of her mother. They also discover that C.'s father and mother each have lovers they knew before their marriage, that their affairs have continued since their marriage,that their respective lovers are themselves lovers, and finally that the four of them M ria

Stein and J�nos Hamar in addition to C.�s parents � know everything; �my father and mother also wrote letters to each other in which they discussed their feelings about being caught up in this inextricably complicated foursome. . . .� (*Memories*, 342.)

As an adult living and writing in a small Hungarian village, C asks:

> How could we have known then that our relationship reenacted, repeated, and copied, in a playfully exaggerated form . . . our parents� ideals and also their ruthless practices, and to some extent the publicly proclaimed ideals and ruthless practices of that historical period as well? Playing at being investigators was nothing but a crude, childishly distorted, cheap imitation; we could call it aping, but we could also call it something real . . . more precisely, for us it was turning their [Maja�s and C.�s fathers�] activities into a game that enabled us to experience their present life and work � which we thought was wonderful, dangerous, important, and, what�s more, respectable . . . we loved being serious, we basked in the glory of our assumed political role, not only filled with terror and remorse but bestowing on us a grand sense of power, a feeling that we had power even over them, over these enormously powerful men, and all in the name of an ethical precept that, again in their own views, was considered sacred, nothing less than the ideal, self-abnegating, perfect, immaculate Communist purity of their way of life; and what a cruel quirk of fate it was that through it all they were totally unsuspecting, and how could they have guessed that, while in their puritanical and also very practical zeal they were killing scores of real and imagined enemies, they were nurturing vipers in their bosom? for after all, who disgraced their ideals more outrageously than we? who put their ideals more thoroughly to the test than we, in our innocence? and since we also harbored the same witch-hunter�s suspicion toward them and toward each other, which they had planted in us and bred in themselves, with whom could we have shared the dreadful knowledge of our transgressions, whom? I couldn�t talk about things like this with Kriszti�n or K�lman, nor could Maja discuss them with H�di or Livia, for how could they have understood? even though we lived in the same world, ruled by the same *Zeitgeist*, this would have been too alien for them, too bizarre, too repulsive.

> Our secrets carried us into the world of the powerful, initiated us into adulthood by making us prematurely mature and sensible, and of course set us apart from the world of ordinary people, where everything worked more simply and predictably.
>
> These love letters referred openly and unequivocally to the hours in which, by some peculiar mistake, we had been conceived – by mistake, because they didn't want us, they wanted only their love. (*Memories*, 342-343.)

Finally, C. writes: "I imagine the archangels covered God's eyes while we pored over these letters." (*Memories*, 344.)

This texture of lies and deceptions constitute the nexus of his relationships, especially at home. Years later C. remembered the night he stumbled home drunk on brandy shared by his friend K–lman. He fell on the porch under his grandfather's window and did not want to go into the house for although he loathed it,

> . . . it had to be the only place for me.
>
> Even today, while attempting to recall the past, with as precise and impartial perspective as possible, I find it difficult to speak objectively of this house where people living under the same roof grew so far apart, were so consumed by their own physical and moral disintegration, were left to fend for themselves, and only for themselves, that they did not notice, or pretended not to notice, when someone was missing, their own child, from the so-called family nest.
>
> Why didn't they notice?
>
> I must have been so totally unmissed by everyone that I didn't realize I was living in a hell of being absent, thinking this hell to be the world. (*Memories*, 288.)

* * *

> If there was a way for me to know when this mutually effective and multifaceted disintegration had begun, whether it had a definite beginning or

> when and why this commodious family nest had grown cold, I would surely have much to say about human nature and also about the age I lived in.
>
> I won�t delude myself; I do not possess the surpassing wisdom of the gods. (*Memories*, 288.)

This all too brief summary of Narrative C provides us crucial insights into C.�s life ⁄ that he experienced himself as divided, incomplete, and morally repulsive; that he yearns for fulfillment, comfort, and release proffered by his kiss of Kriszti�n ⁄ a yearning that he will seek to fulfill through heterosexual and homosexual love affairs; that he spied upon his friend Kriszti�n and as well as his other friends ⁄ especially Maja, H�di and Livia, as well as his parents; and that the relationships within his family were built upon lies and deception.61 [18]

The final chapter of the novel, A7, entitled ⁄Escape,⁄ merges the A. and C. narrators. A. resumes the story ⁄ begun in the first chapter of the novel ⁄ of his journey to Heiligendamm after Melchior has fled East Germany and how he was picked up by the police, taken to Bad Doberan, only to held until his papers were seen to be in order. After he is released by the authorities in Bad Doberan and while he is waiting for a train to return him to East Berlin, he remembers his visit earlier in East Berlin to M⁄ria Stein, his father⁄s former lover. The visit was made by A./C.

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61 [18] I am aware that the summary itself only supplies the listed characteristics of C⁄s life, but I felt that it was necessary for me to embellish these with details that emerge from the 680 pages or so!

ostensibly to ask her whether Theodor Thoenissen or J&#65533;nos Hamar were his father. He remembers that she told him about her imprisonment &#65533; along with J&#65533;nos Hamar she too was denounced by C.&#65533;s father, Theodor &#65533; and about her life with Theodor after the death of his wife. Finally, she told him how Theodor asked her to look at him out the window when he got down in the street; when she looked &#65533;He shot himself through the mouth.&#65533; (*Memories*, 692.) The narrator left, closed the door and ran out of the building. He never asked who his father was. (700)

Although the obvious connection between Voegelin and N&#65533;das is their emphasis upon recollection and remembrance62 [19] , I suggest that their treatments of consciousness and history offer foci for further exploration and thought. In his prefatory remarks to Chapter 3, &#65533;Anamnesis,&#65533; Voegelin lists the assumptions which

62 [19] Even though both are engaged in recollecting, Voegelin limits his recollections to the first ten years of his life, and records only those memories of those experiences that opened to him sources of excitation leading to further philosophical reflection. See Eric Voegelin, &#65533;Anamnesis,&#65533; in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 6, *Anamnesis*, ed. David Walsh, trans. M. J. Hanak, Gerhard Niemeyer, et. al. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002) 84. In the Niemeyer translation Chapter 3 is entitled &#65533;Anamnetic Experiments.&#65533; N&#65533;das remembers the influences upon consciousness in his adolescence and young adulthood &#65533; with perhaps one exception &#65533; that living in a regime and household full of lies of both the body and soul. *The End of a Family Story*, by N&#65533;das, may provide a better direct comparison with Voegelin's anamnetic experiments, since that novel deals with pre-adolescent childhood.

underlie the anamnetic experiments. Two of these are important for relating Voegelin's work on consciousness to that of N[illegible]das. Voegelin writes:

> (2) that in its intentional function consciousness, in finite experience, transcends into the world, and that this type of transcendence is only one among several and must not be made the central theme of a theory of consciousness; (3) that the experiences of transcendence of consciousness into the body, the external world, the community, history and the ground of being are givens in the biography of consciousness, and thus antecede the systematic reflection on consciousness. . . .63 [20]

Here, I emphasize two points made in the preceding passage: (1) consciousness transcends *into the body* as well as the differentiated world that is external to the body; and (2) "the experiences of transcendence of consciousness" constitute a *biography* of a consciousness that as we will see below must always be the consciosness of a particular person.

Voegelin then emphasizes that "the capacity for transcendence is a fundamental feature of consciousness just as much as is illumination; it is given." (*Anamnesis,* 71.) It is only necessary here to point out that for the narrators of *A Book of Memories,* consciousness has a content derived from the experiences of their body and of the world outside these bodies. A., describing what was not there during his period of unsconsciousness and was there during the very brief moment of regaining consciousness, says:

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63 [20] Ibid.

> my consciousness was lacking all those inner flashes of instinct and habit that, relying on experience and desires, evoke images and sounds, ensure the unbroken flow of imagination and memory that renders our existence sensible and to an extent even purposeful, enables us to define our position in the world and establish contact with our surroundings, or to relinquish this connection, which in itself is a form of contact. . . . (*Memories*, 94.)

It is consciousness for A. that both enables us to "establish contact with our surroundings" and to make sense of what is happening to us. Both Voegelin and N[illegible]das would agree, I think, that our consciousness enables us to transcend into the world, that the body is implicated in this transcending into the world, that the residues of this transcendence we call experience, and that memory permits our consciousness to validate our biographies.

There is also, however, something else. A. writes:

> When I finally came to on the rocky embankment of Heiligendamm, I may have known where I was and in what condition, yet I[illegible]d have to say that this was nothing more than *sensing* existence in pure, disembodied form. . . during the first and probably very brief phase of my returning to consciousness I felt no lack of any kind, if only because experiencing that *senseless and purposeless state* filled the very void I should have perceived as a lack; the sharp, slippery rocks did make me sense my body, water on my face did make my skin tingle, therefore I had to be aware of rocks and water and body and skin, yet these points of awareness, so keen in and of themselves, did not relate to the real situation which, in my normal state, I would have considered very unpleasant, dangerous, even intolerable; precisely because these sensations were so acute, so intense, and because I now felt what a moment ago I couldn[illegible]t yet have experienced, which meant that consciousness was returning to its customary track of remembering and comparing, I could not expect to absorb everything my consciousness had to offer, but on the contrary, *what little I did perceive of water, stones, my skin, and body, wrenched as it was from a context or relationship, alluded rather to that*

> *intangible whole, that deeper, primeval completeness for which we all keep yearning, awake or in our dreams but mostly in vain*; in this sense, then, what had passed, the total insensibility of unconsciousness, proved to be a far stronger sensual pleasure than the sensation of real things, so if I had any purposeful desire at that point, it was not to recover but to relapse, not to regain consciousness but to faint again; this may have been the first so-called thought formed by a mind becoming once again partially conscious, comparing my state of "some things I can already feel" not with my state prior to losing consciousness but with unconsciousness itself, the longing for which was so profound that my returning memory wanted to sink back to oblivion, to recall what could no longer be recalled, to remember the void, the state in which pure sensation produces nothing tangible and the mind is in limbo with nothing to cling to; it seemed that by coming back to consciousness, by being able to think and to remember, I had to lose paradise, the state of bliss whose fragmentary effects might still be felt here and there but as a complete whole had gone into hiding, leaving behind only shreds of its receding self, its memory, and the thought that I had never been, and would never again be, as happy as I had been then and there. (*Memories*, 94-95. Emphasis added.)

In this passage it seems we have a man who as he returns to consciousness, has a "memory" – just an allusion really – of the peace of the void, of unconsciousness, from which he emerged into his present of time and memory, into the past of his time and memory, and therefore into consciousness. In this allusion and in this "glimpse" I think that A. has created an inchoate symbol -- "an allusive and intangible whole" – that expresses a dimension of what Voegelin calls the ground of being. I don't think, however, that it corresponds exactly to Voegelin's use of the term, since it is more like the primeval stuff from which being things emerge and differentiate. This longing for the whole – experienced by A. at the seashore motivates both A. and C., who are after all one narrative self, to search for that wholeness in relationships.

In discussing the capacity our consciousness has to transcend into the world and to find there others like ourselves – *Nebenmenschen*, Voegelin was particularly pointed in his critique of Husserl's question: "How is the Thou constituted in the I as an *alter ego*?" Essentially, Voegelin argues the question is a non-question and raises a problem that doesn't exist for a theory of consciousness, for "the problem of the Thou seems to me to resemble that of all other cases of transcendence. The fact that consciousness has an experience *at all* of another human being, as a consciousness of the other, is not *a problem* but a given of experience from which one may proceed but never regress." (*Anamnesis*, 72?.) Instead, Voegelin asserts, the fundamental question is: "In what symbolic language can the other human person be acknowledged as such?" (*Anamnesis*, 72.) This is, I think, the primary problem that faces the storyteller, N–das the novelist; and, in *A Book of Memories* – perhaps simply as a novelist – he solves the problem by creating what he calls his other selfs, what I will call his narrative selfs. The narrative selfs permit N–das to compare his novel with Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. In this obligatory disclaimer called "Author's Note" that all novelists must write in our historical age intoxicated on objective reality and facts, N–das writes:

> It is my pleasant duty to state that what I have written is not my own memoirs. I have written a novel, the recollections of several people separated by time, somewhat in the manner of Plutarch–s *Parallel Lives*. The memoirists might conceivably all be me, though none of them is. So the locations, names, events, and situations in the story aren–t real but, rather, products of a novelist–s imagination. Should anyone recognize someone, -- or God forbid!

> should any event, name, or situation match actual ones, that can only be a fatal coincidence, and in this respect, if in no other, I am compelled to disclaim responsibility. (Memories, front material.)

N□das's use of the symbol "parallel lives" permits him to rely upon his own experiences and through the creation of narrative selfs who share these experiences to understand his own self. In the essay, "The Novelist and His Selfs," N□das states that a novelist faces

> the question of what to do with the kind of knowledge possessed by a single individual, especially when the individual happens to be me.
>
> Sometimes I can write a novel using this knowledge, sometimes I can□t□.
>
> A more pressing question for me, though, is whether I am able, without my imagination, to obey the Delphic oracle□s well-known injunction to know myself. Can I know myself without knowing others? Or to put it differently, is there self-knowledge which is not at the same time knowledge of the world? And conversely, can any knowledge of the world be complete without self-knowledge?64 [21]

In *A Book of Memories*, this use of narrative selfs permits the reader (1) to juxtapose Narrator A./C. with the Narrator B □ Thomas Thoenissen (both of their fathers were sexually active outside the marriage bond and both catch their fathers *in flagrante dēlictō*), (2) to juxtapose Narrator A./C. with Kriszti□n □ narrator of the penultimate chapter and friend of A./C. (they were "ruled by the same *Zeitgeist*"), and (3) to

64 [21] P□ter N□das, "The Novelist and His Selfs," *The New Hungarian Quarterly* 33, no. 127 (1992): 19.

juxtapose Melchior and Narrator A./C. (Melchior lived in soviet Communist dominated political systems65 [22]).

Later in Part III of *Anamnesis*, a meditation entitled ❓The Order of Consciousness,❓ Voegelin emphasizes the given that human consciousness is always found in a particular human being. He writes:

> Human consciousness is not a free-floating something but always a concrete consciousness of concrete persons. The consciousness of the existential tension toward the ground, therefore, while constituting the specific human nature that distinguishes man from other beings, is not the whole of his nature. For consciousness is always concretely grounded in man❓s bodily existence, which links him to all realms of being, from the realm of inorganic matter to the realm of the animate. (*Anamnesis*, 398.)

When he discussed the emphasis upon vitality found in many 19th and 20th century theories of consciousness, he emphasized that these focuses were legitimate because they created a greater balance in ❓our views of the world of consciousness.❓ He states that ❓the connection [between the body and consciousness] is so intimate that between birth and death the body not only *determines, as the sensorium*, what part of the world may enter consciousness through it, but also is one of the most important determinants (*although not the only one*) for the inner tensions and relations of

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65 [22] See pp. 206-207, *Memories*, where Melchior talks about the regime of lies in East Germany, while C. provides this information through the more personal medium of describing the characteristics of his family relationships.

relevance of the world of consciousness.&#65533; (*Anamnesis*, 65. Emphasis added.) If, however, the body is emphasized as *the* determinant of consciousness the result is a pneumato-pathological morbidity that deforms consciousness and ultimately results in the programs of ideologues who would remake the world in the image of their own consciousnesses. Voegelin&#65533;s insistence upon the given fact of the embodiment of consciousness provides an interesting interface with N&#65533;das.

N&#65533;das insists upon directing our attention to the body. As noted earlier, the epigraph for *A Book of Memories*, from John 2:21 KJV reads: &#65533;But he spoke of the temple of his body.&#65533; In his novel, this emphasis leads N&#65533;das, I think, in two directions. On the one hand, it leads the &#65533;narrative selfs&#65533;66 [23] to include descriptive meditations on consciousness that pose interesting connections between the body and the consciousness of the particular narrative self; there are no abstract dissertations on consciousness but only elaborations of experiences of a narrative self. On the other hand, his insistence on the &#65533;temple of the body&#65533; leads him into very graphic sensual-erotic descriptions of the various bodily activities in which his narrative selfs engage. Even though I do not have time to develop the idea, I think that the sensual-erotic emphases within the novel are crucial to the truth of the novel for they link the deceptions and lies of the child-adolescent C. with the historical

66 [23] The use of the term &#65533;selfs&#65533; I have adapted from N&#65533;das. See Footnote 1 above.

Zeitgeist and political regime of R□kosi through the medium of the lies and deceptions that permeate his family relationships, especially with his father and mother. They also link the child-adolescent C. with the adult A. through the medium of biographically shared experiences.

While the narrative selfs do not devote an inordinate volume of space to direct meditations on consciousness, they do explore, explicate, and amplify as fully as possible what it means to say that consciousness is embodied; they wade through that □exceedingly ordinary thing□ □ □lived experience!□ In one sense, *A Book of Memories*, may be read as a gloss on the embodied consciousness upon which Voegelin insists.

Whereas Voegelin says □that between birth and death the body not only determines, as the sensorium, what part of the world may enter consciousness through it, but also is one of the most important determinants (although not the only one) for the inner tensions and relations of relevance of the world of consciousness,□ Narrator C. asserts □□ the body, the human form, however devoutly we may expound in our Christian humility on the externality of the flesh and the primacy of the soul, is so potent a given that already at the moment of our birth, it becomes an immutable attribute.□ (*Memories*, 166.)

Voegelin's reliance upon the Platonic Anthropological Principle, i.e., the state is man writ large, supplies another interesting interface with *A Book of Memories*.67 [24] Simplistically speaking, there are two dimensions to this principle, viz., (1) the constituent components of human nature are reflected in the constituent components of the state, and (2) the dominant constituent component of an individual human being creates the character of that person and the dominant constituent component in a state creates the form of government in that state. I argue then that the characteristics of the rulers of Hungary during the period of Narrator C.'s pre-adolescent and adolescent years – approximately 1949 to 1958, i.e., the regimes of M'tyas R'kosi and J'nos K'd'r – are mirrored in the character of Narrator C./A. Even though there is only one narration of a political event – the popular demonstration in Budapest on October 23, 1956, a demonstration in which both C. and his friend K'lman were swept up and during which K'lman is killed – Narrative C. is simultaneously the story of C. and his friends, of C. and his family, and of the political system in which they lived.

While the direct linkage between C. and the state is his father, the linkage extends to his mother and to his parents' lovers – M'ria Stein and J'nos Hamar.

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67 [24] While Voegelin does not in *Anamnesis* overtly deal with the Platonic Anthropological Principle applied to the study of political forms, the principle is assumed in the work and he does discuss Plato's work on human types.

Since that foursome is bound together by the sensual-erotic, and since that sensual-erotic bond is rooted in deception (of C.) and betrayal, I think that a primary linkage ◆ if not *the* primary linkage ◆ between C.'s deceptive, divided self and the deceptive nature of the state (through the deceptive family) is the sensual-eroticism that permeates the novel.68 [25] In

only one narration of a political event ◆ the popular demonstration in Budapest on October 23, 1956, a demonstration in which both C and his friend K◆lman were swept up and during which K◆lman is killed ◆ Narrative C is simultaneously the story of C and his friends, of C and his family, and of the political system in which they lived.

While the direct linkage between C and the state is his father, the linkage extends to his mother and to his parents◆ lovers ◆ M◆ria Stein and J◆nos Hamar. Since that foursome is bound together by the sensual-erotic, and since that sensual-erotic bond is rooted in deception (of C) and betrayal, I think that a primary linkage ◆ if not *the* primary linkage ◆ between C's deceptive, divided self and the deceptive nature of the state (through the deceptive family) is the sensual-eroticism that

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68 [25] N◆das is not the only novelist to link eroticism with political oppression. Two other Central European novelists who have also written creatively and imaginatively about this relationship are Milan Kundera in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting,*

permeates the novel.69 [26] In fact, a large portion of the novel itself is devoted to describing the various sensual-erotic activities through which the characters engage and relate to each other. For example, and most important for the development of C's character, C remembers several episodes: sensual-erotically charged encounters between his pre-adolescent self (these episodes are the only pre-adolescent memories recalled by C) and his father, on the one hand, and his mother, on the other.70 [27] The encounter with his father is the occasion one early morning when C crawled into bed and fondled his still sleeping father who shouted, kicked him out of bed, never touched him again, and was always on the lookout for any effeminate behaviors from C. The other encounter with his mother seems to be a recurring one in which C sits by his mother's bed and caresses her arm and kisses the crook of her neck and her arm in the crook of the elbow. On one such occasion, C's mother dreamily recounts a time when she was picnicking with two men (presumably Theodor Thoenissen and J�nos

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27 N�das is not the only novelist to link eroticism with political oppression. Two other Central European novelists who have also written creatively and imaginatively about this relationship are Milan Kundera in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans.Aaron Asher (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996); originally published as *Le Livre du rire et de l'oubli* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1979); and P�ter Esterh�zy in *A Little Hungarian Pornography*, trans. Judith Sollosy (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995); originally published as *Kis Magyar Pornogr�fia* (Budapest: Magvet�, 1984)..

28 For a good quick look at these encounters between C and his parents, see *Book of Memories*, 151-171.

Hamar), and they (the three of them) could not decide to whom she belonged. (*Memories*, 151-155.)

> For three years he lived with [my aunts] in this house. In this room. And if in these reminiscences I've been referring to him as my friend, it is not because of our shared boyhood but because during these three years we became very close. Even if we spoke mostly in allusions. Whether we talked of our past or our present, we both cautiously avoided total candor. . . . But after twenty years we did return to that mutual attraction which had once transcended our dissimilarities and which we didn't know what to make of as children. This reversion may have had to do with the fact that slowly but surely my successes were turning into failures, and that he never again wanted to be united with anyone on any level. Not with me, either. He remained attentive, sensitive, but shut up in himself. Turned cold. If I wasn't familiar with the painful reverse side of this coldness, I'd be tempted to say that he became an accurate, intelligently responding, precisely calibrated machine.
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> My experiences in human relations have made me see everything in this world as temporary and ephemeral. . . . I have never lied to myself, because I know all about the necessary fluctuations of purposeful action. In the foregoing pages I have already prepared my balance sheet. No loves, no friends. . . . But in me the absence of this feeling has remained so vivid that it is all I can feel. Which simply means that I haven't yet sunk into total apathy. And that is probably the reason why during those three years it became a vital necessity to have the attentiveness and sensitivity of someone whom I didn't need to, wasn't allowed to, touch. And he himself no longer had such desires. Still, he was closer to me than anyone whose body I could possess. (*Memories*, 672-673).

The application of the Anthropological Principle to *A Book of Memories* could continue with the multiplication of examples, but I shall leave it to the reader to share the fun of tracking down these examples in this complex and wonderful novel. I forgo the continuation of my own pleasure in this enterprise in order to comment very

briefly upon the consciousness of Ndas the storyteller and, perhaps, make one more point of connection with the storyteller Eric Voegelin, philosopher. As I have already mentioned, Ndas has used the technique of other selfs in his writing. In the previously mentioned essay, "The Novelist and His Self," Ndas has explained this. He says

> Much like my other works, I wrote my latest, lengthy novel in the first person. It is true, though, that this time, with two cuts I divided myself into three. I said I have at least one self to contend with, but in my imagination there may be room for as many as three personae, who will speak concurrently for themselves and for me. . . . The first-person narrative invariably steered me toward confession, so I had to keep examining the events of my own life, and use only as many of them as these personae would allow. In the little openings and crevices between them and my own self, imagination could freely do its work, and it did, pushing my ego aside in the process. The logic of my own life history could remain in the dark, though its contours had to be visible. I didn't know why things happened the way they did, but I could more or less tell what belonged and what didn't.
>
> It was the logic of imagination and not of experience that showed me the way. The prompts did not come from me.71 [28]

The "logic of the imagination," I suggest, is the novelist's equivalent to what Voegelin has called in the work of philosophers, "reflective distance." Although "reflective distance" is reserved by Voegelin for the philosopher's articulation of moments of divine-human encounters, and the novelist, Ndas, has simply attempted to articulate

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71 [28] Pter Ndas, "The Novelist and His Selfs," *The New Hungarian Quarterly* 33, no. 127 (1992): 20-21.

that most " exceedingly ordinary thing . . . lived experience" it is the imagination of the novelist (or any artist?) to prevent his work being relevant only to his self, for as N�das says, the na�ve expression of the imagination – *Madame Bovary, c'est moi* – "is the only possible means by which the age-old need to relate events occurring between people can still be satisfied."72 [29]

Appendix I

Table of Contents organized by narrators

for *A Book of Memories* by

P�ter N�das73 [30]

72 [29] Ibid. 20.

73 [30] I take sole responsibility for violating the creative unity of the novel itself. I apologize only for the temporary inconvenience it may cause the reader, and, of course, the proper remedy for this analytical violation is to read (or, perhaps, re-read) the novel.

A6. In Which he Tells Thea All about Melchior's Confession. 512-571 Part II

A7. Escape. [last chapter] 682-706 Part III

Narrative B. Narrator B.: Thomas Thoenissen, writer of late 19th century Germany.

B1 Our Afternoon Walk of Long Ago 21-37 Part I

B2 Sitting in God's Hands 66-79 Part I

B3 Our Afternoon Walk Continued 109-127 Part I

B4 On An Antique Mural 227-252 Part II

B5 Table d'H'te 450-477 Part II

B6 The Nights of Our Secret Delight 571-592 Part III

Narrative C. Narrator C.: a thirty-three old man with the surname Thoenissen remembering his growing up in the Buda of the 1950s.

Narrative C6'. Narrator: Kriszti'n Somi T't, a character throughout the C narrative.

C1 The Soft Light of the Sun 38-52 Part I

C2 Slowly the Pain Returned 80-93 Part I

C3 Girls 127-184 Part I

C4. Grass Grew over the Scorched Spot. 252-381 Part II

C5 The Year of Funerals 477-512 Part III

C6' No More 592-681. Part III