

# A STORYTELLER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF HIMSELF

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## ABSTRACT

Lajos Ámi (1886–1963) was one of the most talented Gypsy storytellers in Hungary whose repertoire includes more than 250 tales. In his stories, Ámi applied a lot of autobiographical elements (also in fairy tales) and so the question arises, what does the term autobiographical mean in the context of folk tales? The question is unfolded in relation to both the role of the storyteller him/herself and to storytellers operating as public intellectuals in their local communities. The distinction, and also the relationship between these roles, are significant and have implications to what is revealed autobiographically, on what grounds and in what way. This article outlines the analysis of autobiographical motifs and their roles in Ámi's interpretation and presentation of himself in his storytelling.

KEYWORDS: folk tale • storytelling • autobiography • Gypsy folklore

## INTRODUCTION

Sándor Erdész was a famous Hungarian ethnographer who collected Lajos Ámi's tales in the early 1960s. In his opinion there is an easily observable fact in Ámi – the gypsy story-teller's – tales, which is the usage of autobiographical elements (Erdész 1968: 10–20). Max Lüthi, as one of the most significant experts in fairy tales, suggested an approach to interpreting the hero that sees him as a man who wants to realise himself in his own story. This basically psychological approach is established through the everyday comprehension of modern personality. Manhood has to be proven by overcoming the difficulties that have arisen in the inner world of the man. "To be a king is an image for complete self-realisation; the crown and royal robe which play such a great role in the fairy tale make visible splendor and brilliance of the great perfection achieved inwardly" (Lüthi 1976: 139).

Lüthi agrees with other ethnographers that there is a causal interdependence between the plot of tale and the storyteller's sociocultural reality (Lüthi 1962: 84–88). Of course we should not forget Lüthi's Jungian theoretical background which determines his interpretative horizon. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the issue of autobiographical elements in folk tales is a special aspect of reflected sociocultural reality. The storyteller's story is rooted in his/her social environment. By interpreting his/her own biography, the storyteller elaborates his/her concepts on the community and gives an authentic evaluation of the socio-cultural reality (Dégh 1972: 59).

A number of recent studies deal with the status of autobiographical motifs in folk tales. Nevertheless the approaches to the topic are extremely different and most of them involve completely incongruent aspects. For instance David Hopkin (2004) draws attention to the fairy tale panels in the autobiographical memoirs written by French veterans of the early 19th century. According to Hopkin the fairy tales offered schemes for interpreting sociocultural otherness as well as the understanding of the self in a war situation. In this approach the conception of the fairy tale contains adequate chance of a very personal self-assertion that is aligned with the expectations of the story-teller's community.

Another interesting approach is taken by Elisabeth Wanning Harries in her frequently quoted recent essay titled "The Mirror Broken: Women's Autobiography and Fairy Tales" (2004). One of her inspiring ideas is to talk about the ways contemporary female writers reflect on the function of fairy tales in their childhood and about how this latent factor is mirrored in their autobiographical confessions.

All of the mentioned approaches deal genuinely with the autobiographical elements of tales; nevertheless I suggest a further approach concerning the topic of Ámi's tales. Specifically, we should bear in mind that there is a conceptual parallelism between his autobiographical self-evaluation and the socio-cultural domain of his tales that can be investigated on the level of text.<sup>1</sup> In other words, in Ámi's text a finely integrated conception of his life-story can be observed that is an interpretation of the socio-cultural framework as well. In my opinion, due to these characteristics, the contemporary post-critical reading technique of anthropological texts elaborated by Johannes Fabian might serve as an adequate interpretative approach to Ámi's art of storytelling.

Fabian is a leading figure as well as an outstanding theorist of contemporary socio-cultural anthropology. In the last two decades his interests focused on the critical revision of basic theoretical and methodological concepts of anthropology. In Fabian's analysis we can observe the functional concept of the Other and otherness as an impulsive force of contemporary critical anthropology.<sup>2</sup>

In his recently published book *Ethnography as Commentary*, Johannes Fabian (2008) examined the issue of relevant writing and reading strategy in anthropology from a theoretical point of view. According to his reasoning, the commentary can be an alternative and genuine form of writing-strategy and interpretation in anthropology to ethnographical monographs, because a commentary is not overburdened by the expectations of disciplinary tradition (Fabian 2008: 9–31). I am not interested in a detailed presentation of Fabian's general concept and function of commentary. But his theory of commentary provides a quite novel way to grasp the topic of autobiographical constituents in Ámi's tales.

Fabian starts his book with an autobiographical 'tale' dating from the 1970s and presents a very impressive reinterpretation of his memories. In 1974 he was a guest lecturer in Congo. As a young scholar he rented a house in Lumumbashi city located in the northern part of this huge country. During Mobutu's dictatorship lack of food and other goods were frequent at the end of the dry season. Consequently burglary and theft were widespread in the region so Fabian and the other foreigners were frightened. He had already been acquainted with a native healer and sorcerer who offered him a protection ritual against theft and other crimes. In *Ethnography as Commentary*, Fabian reconstructs his meeting with Kahenga Mukonkwa Michael, who was operating as a

practitioner and who became the person and subject matter of Fabian's anthropological understanding. According to Fabian, Kahenga was a representative figure of sociocultural otherness. Fabian in his text also examined his own expectations and observations shaping his interpretation. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of Fabian's encounter with Kahenga raises more questions in relation to the reading of the anthropological sense of the Other (Fabian 2008: 46–54).

Fabian's description of Kahenga's visit consists of a series of images evoking the mood, atmosphere and spectacle of a late tropical afternoon. Reading the text (autobiographical 'tale') we can see the anthropologist in the role of an observer visualising an event from a long time ago with the help of images preserved in his mind. From the storyteller's viewpoint both, Kahenga and Fabian are strangers to each other.

On the one hand the white anthropologist in his light tropical clothes waiting for the sorcerer's performance remains. He is a rational Western man who is sceptical about the factual usefulness of the rite of "closing the house", but he trusts Kahenga's fame and hopes that the ritual will indirectly keep away potential offenders. On the other side there is the semi-nude black specialist performing absolutely incomprehensible acts in Fabian's garden. He dug out eight shallow holes and placed objects he had brought along in each. Finally – in Fabian's words – Kahenga "made a third round, now crouching over each hole and covering it with dirt which he seemed to move with his buttocks" (Fabian 2008: 24).

In Fabian's understanding, the insoluble social and cultural distance between the two men in that moment of the "closing the house" rite seemed to be self-explanatory. However, Kahenga as the representative of socio-cultural otherness has further important analytical function in relation to the understanding of the situation. His figure throws new light upon the anthropological sense of the sociocultural Other. While Fabian examined his own reflections on the evoked images of memory he had to recognise in himself the manifestation of the Other. Let me cite Fabian briefly:

[...] my wife and I stood there facing Kahenga, still not knowing what to do. He quickly bent down, touched the ground, and then used his thumb to rub some dirt on our foreheads. [...] He could not know that what he had just done to me triggered deep memories of Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, when we went to church to receive the sign of the cross in ash on our foreheads from a priest muttering *memento quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris* (remember that you are dust and you shall to return to dust). Though the two rites had little or nothing in common as far as content, or intent, was concerned [...] for me they merged as bodily experiences. Kahenga had pulled me back into a realm I had left behind long ago. (Fabian 2008: 23)

Apart from giving further details of Fabian's analysis concerning his meeting with the native healer in Congo, the multi-faceted critical anthropological sense of the sociocultural Other is clear in this quote. Fabian suggests an extension of its meaning that involves three aspects.

First, the Other who appertains to a world beyond ours and who represents the classic subject matter of anthropology in itself (as Kahenga, the healer does in the above example). Second, the 'Other in the Self' who reflects our own otherness involving also our own world (I mean the anthropologist's culture) as an inseparable part of anthropo-

logical comprehension (as the memory of Ash Wednesday does in the example above). Finally, with this point we may turn to the constructive role of memory that creates a number of contesting readings of otherness. This third layer or dimension of complexity involves the interpreter (I mean his institutions, academic background, personal motives, scientific intentions and so on) who has to take himself (herself) as an object of understanding: in this context the interpreter is the reflexive subject of his (or her) interpretation in that very role.

In my opinion Fabian's reading strategy of his own autobiographical story and the related theoretical as well as methodological consequences can be applied efficiently in the analyses of Ámi's tales. If we read his related texts as ethnographic source material for an autobiography, in which the storyteller identifies himself with a representative of socio-cultural otherness, the adaptation of Fabian's conception might be beneficial. First, the autobiographical motifs in Ámi's tales are used to describe the Other, which means that the figure of the storyteller used as a representation of the self appears as the subject of interpretation both for the storyteller and for the reader. Second, the 'Other in the Self' refers to Ámi's comprehension of his own culture and history as an integrated aspect of his autobiographical narrative.

Ámi's biographical references are inbuilt into the deeper polyphonic structure of the stories. Even though this thought might be quite banal for the reader who knows Ámi's oeuvre a bit better, still we should strive to comprehend the causes and characteristics of his story-telling strategy. Moreover, the investigation of biographical aspects in Ámi's tales is going to help us to understand the ethics of folk tales as well. Firstly, I circumscribe the general features of the autobiographical elements in Ámi's folk tales. Secondly, based on a classical fairy tale titled *The King Little Michael* (*Király Kis Miklós* AT 300, AT 301A and its variants), I investigate the relation between the autobiographical self in the tale and the concept of self-ethics in Ámi's storytelling.

According to the classification of storytellers, Ámi was not one who insisted on the very same texts or structure in his telling. In other words, the order of motifs and episodes were not determined strictly in his tales and they did not compose a kind of closed text.

Approaching the problematic of usage the autobiographical elements in Ámi's tales we shall conclude that, because of the lack of systematic usage of them, they might seem contingent fragments at first. We can regard this feature of his storytelling as an instrument applied in order to deconstruct the structure of a classical tale type. If we analyse these stories a bit more deeply we realise that the autobiographical motifs are important constituents. Thus does a challenging recognition arise: we start to wonder how a storytelling community works, how it accepts tales that include details of the teller's very personal life.

In the following I would like to examine the significance of autobiographical constituents in folk tales in relation to the unavoidable task of reinterpreting the figure of the storyteller and generally the storytelling in Ámi's case. In other words, in my hypothesis the storyteller is always more than just a specialised entertainer of his community. He is also a consequent mediator and critic of the general scale of values and norms that has been expressed (partially) by the autobiographical evaluation of the self. The usage of autobiographical elements and examples helps him to act out the role of interpreter, which is also a community expectation towards him.

Ámi paraphrases the love story of his youth in the tale titled “The Boar has Been Eating Corn for Seven Years”, which is a variation of *The Man Marries the Princess* (AT 850–AT 869). There is a king whose cornfield was robbed by boars every night and neither his soldiers nor other young people were able to protect it. Everyone who took the risk but failed had been beheaded. The last one in the queue was an “intemperate vagabond Gipsy lad” (Ámi 1968: 458) who was able to save the corn and won the princess’ hand. In the quixotic story the Gipsy’s helpmate was a bewitched frog that was also a princess and, when the protagonist gave her a slice of bread, she was released from the curse. In Ámi’s text the situation is given in detail:

The lad roasted his bacon on the fire. While he was roasting it, he saw the frog eating the bread. The frog suddenly turned into a wonderful woman so beautiful it was easier to look at the sun, than in her eyes. She was seven times more beautiful than the sun itself. Then he said:

– Oh my God! Why should I seek the king’s daughter? She is not as beautiful as this woman is. (Ámi 1968: 459)

The princess, called Gisela, released from the curse, promised to marry the Gipsy lad as a sign of her gratitude toward the boy.

In this scene one can identify a number of parallels reminding us of Ámi’s life story. In the year 1900, when he was only fourteen, he started to work as an assistant to an Italian stock boss in a brickyard in Szatmárnémeti (recently Satu Mare, Romania). Ámi referred to his boss as Vince Bunkó (Hick), his first master in teaching tales. He learned around one hundred stories from Vince Bunkó. In addition to this, he became acquainted with his boss’s beautiful daughter, called Gisela, in the brickyard. In his recorded biography sixty years later Ámi referred to the girl as the owner of the most wonderful name of the world. Nevertheless Ámi’s career had ended suddenly in Szatmárnémeti. He summarised the case as follows: “I made a ‘mistake’ with the boss’s daughter” (Erdész 1968: 14). After the affair he thought that it was better to escape from the brickyard, but the name Gisela was mentioned and embedded in his stories, always referring to a woman of great beauty.

The autobiographic motif, i.e. the fact that the princess is released of her curse and the daughter of his former boss have the very same name, is further detailed later on in the story, together with other biographical facts. As an example we shall take the scene in which the protagonist raises some scepticism in relation to the question whether he can be accepted or not by his bride’s family as a husband. The Gipsy lad gave voice to his own sceptical attitudes as follows:

– I wonder if we shall meet some trouble with that. I must confess, for I don’t want to be secretive about it, that I am a Gipsy lad.

– You were tiny like a piece of a millet-grain in your mother’s womb when I had already known that you are a Gipsy. But I don’t want to pay attention to that. It does not matter to me whether you are Gipsy or Hungarian, Jewish or Slovakian. You are always a creation of God. I love you! What can the problem be then? (Ámi 1968: 460–461)



We know from Ámi's biographer Sándor Erdész that this polemic touches the most intimate points in the storyteller's life. Specifically, both his relationship with his Gipsy community and his personal ethnic identity were extremely ambiguous. Ámi frequently emphasised not only in his biography but also in the autobiographical motifs of his tales the experiences of ethnic discrimination in his life. Thanks to his excellent story-telling abilities he was able to counteract the depressing situations and, what is more, he could steal a march on his social environment. In the army, in his village and also in his work communities he was successful with his stories: in other words, Ámi recognised story-telling as a method to gain acceptance for his social network.

Furthermore, when reading Ámi's text it becomes clear that the autobiographical self-narrative presents the protagonist as the storyteller's subject matter as part of the storyteller's comprehension of the self. The Gipsy lad represents Ámi in his youth and from the viewpoint of the storytelling he sees himself as somebody Other. The princess' standpoint sheds light on the unavoidable challenge of interpretation concerning the significance of sociocultural (ethnic) otherness in Ámi's life. Let's bear in mind that she says: "You are always a creation of God. I love you! What can the problem be then?" The storyteller's reflexive sentence is an autobiographical allusion that refers to his recent (i.e. the early 1960s) socio-cultural status in his local community.

The conscious usage of his abilities in order to climb the social ladder can be observed when he becomes an applied professional storyteller in the village pub (in Szamosszeg) after World War II. There he earned enough money to build a pretty nice house in a part of the village where only Hungarians lived. His wish to be integrated or, conversely, his wish to emerge from the Gipsy community resulted in a privileged personal position somewhere on the edges of the majority and minority communities.

If we turn back to Gisela's reasoning cited above, i.e. one's ethnic origin does not matter when it is about affection, the situation reminds us of Ámi's early affair with the daughter of his Italian boss. Ámi ranked himself socially lower in status than his lover. Nevertheless, the tale titled "The Boar has Been Eating Corn for Seven Years" is worthy of further analysis since the story contains more allusions in relation to the significance of autobiographical motifs in Ámi's storytelling.

Gisela and the Gipsy lad went home together and the princess introduced her groom to her father (the Black Prince) and her mother. But just before the happy ending a sudden tragedy cast a shadow over the young couple's hopes. Gisela's mother died in tragic circumstances and the marriage had to be postponed. Furthermore, during the mourning Gisela was kidnapped, therefore her groom had to go on a journey to rescue her. This new challenging task required more resolve than the previous occasion, on which he had released Gisela from the curse. During his journey the groom met another bewitched frog that also had to be released.

You should pick me up in your hand, then roll me from one hand to the other for fifteen minutes and meanwhile you have to kiss me fifteen times. Then I will turn into a beautiful woman just like your bride. (Ámi 1968: 466)

This second bewitched princess drew attention to the risk of the test as well. The Gipsy lad should not sicken or hate her during the process because if he does he will die. In order to reduce the risk the protagonist had recourse to fraud.

Wait a second, I have some wine and in order to avoid being sickened I will drink just a bit before we start (ibid.).

After drinking two glasses of wine he gave her not fifteen but twenty-five kisses. The miracle had happened; there stood a girl who was more beautiful than his bride. Her beauty was beyond words.

Both you and my bride are extremely beautiful. I see now that perhaps you are even more beautiful because the Sun delays only for an hour awing her beauty but for yours it stops for at least two hours. (Ibid.)

At this point the Gipsy lad is ready to change his bride for the second woman but she is steady enough to reject his offer. From Ámi's biography we know that in terms of affinity for women he and his protagonist share a similar characteristic. In 1961 Ámi was honoured as a master of folk arts. This acknowledgement brought him fame but also changed his self-estimation somewhat. He was persuaded of his own greatness and talked to his wife about his wish to get a divorce and marry an eighteen-year-old woman. This behaviour exasperated Ámi's wife and contributed to the aggravation of her neurosis (Ámi 1968: 19).

The autobiographical reference of this quote can also be understood on the basis of Fabian's critical reading method of ethnographic narratives. Ámi's hesitation about the new marriage is a latent personal longing that is an incorporated motif in his tale as well as a biographical fact. The storyteller's reality is interwoven with the reality of the tale where the Gipsy lad (protagonist) is ready to yield to temptation, to change his bride.

Summarising the three biographical motifs in Ámi's tale "The Boar has Been Eating Corn for Seven Years": we have Gisela's figure, the protagonist's ethnic status and finally the significance of women's beauty. Nevertheless all of these parallelisms between Ámi and his protagonist do not mean that they are the same. From the storyteller's point of view the figure of the Gipsy lad is not a direct paraphrase of himself. I would rather conclude that in relation to the autobiographical motifs in Ámi's tales the usages of his personal examples serve as tools to elaborate the turning points of the stories as well as the understanding the 'Other in the Self'. In other words, Ámi's tale is more than a biographical story and the allusions draw our attention to the very fundamental questions regarding the functions of a storyteller in his storytelling community.

To confront this challenge and to spell out some of the epistemological conditions of such an enterprise our interpretation might be based on Ámi's tale no. 36 "The Old King's One Eye Is Always Crying But the Other Is Always Laughing" (Ámi 1968: 446). The story can be divided into two clearly distinguishable parts. In fact, the first unit is an interesting version of the type *The Man on a Quest for His Lost Wife* (AT 400), although the closing phase of the tale might be surprising. When the king's youngest son released the fairy princess a wedding reception was announced. The king wanted to hire the most talented Best Man in the World and so he telegraphed every respectable candidate. Among others the storyteller got a telegraph and decided to travel to the court. From this point on the story is told in first person with Ámi talking to the audience on behalf of himself. In other words, Ámi picks up the role of Best Man and starts to tell an anecdote concerning himself as the hero of his tale: "I've received the telegraph and I've read in it that the crying king's son is going to be married soon and he needs a Best Man and an assistant" (Ámi 1968: 455).

The storyteller talks about his former acquaintance with the king, with whom he served in the army. Ámi sends his assistant to buy salt and spices for the wedding feast, but the assistant is negligent and gets drunk in a pub. Ámi presents himself in the protagonist's role as a master of organisation overcoming all the difficulties with great success. Nevertheless, by analysing the closing episode the change of style in story telling appears as a conceptual break in the story. Ámi uses bad language to emphasise the humorous turns.<sup>3</sup> This characteristic is not exceptional in his art of storytelling although in this case, where he identifies himself with the protagonist, the feature acquires an extra meaning. Ámi's undisguised personality in the figure of Best Man is presented as comprehension of the self in the Other.

THE KING LITTLE MICHAEL (KIRÁLY KIS MIKLÓS) AND ITS  
VARIANT AS TOLD BY ÁMI

It is characteristic of classic fairy tales that moral goodness triumphs through the protagonist's conquest of evil. On the surface *The King Little Michael* is a story that falls into this category. However, after deeper analysis we can also grasp the more essential dilemma of ethical issues in the tale.

Supposedly, this type of tales goes back to the old Greek love stories (*fabula milesia*) and survived in the European oral tradition for many centuries (Tarnóc 1967: 298). According to Márton Tarnóc the Hungarian folk tradition knows two versions.<sup>4</sup> In the first the king doesn't let his three daughters marry unidentifiable suitors who are actually dragons. The dragons take vengeance on the people and steal the sun, the moon and the stars. Humankind is left in total darkness, but one servant in the court undertakes the responsibility to win back the light, i.e. in its metaphoric sense of life. He takes the road and after a long journey he destroys the dragons. At a certain point the story reaches a weird turn that reveals the protagonist's unexpected features. During the battle the King Little Michael cuts off all the dragons' heads but one. At this point the beast starts to pray for its life.

Please King Little Michael, let me live and I will give you back the stars.

– Where they are? asked he.

– You can find them under the saddle.

King Little Michael took them out and cut off the last dragon-head.

(Ortutay 1960: 224)

The protagonist remains unforgiving with his two other enemies as well. The question arises: why? Why did he not give the defeated dragons a chance? The protagonist has already fulfilled his task of getting back the light – the sun, moon and stars –, and the original status of the world has been re-established. In addition to this, according to basic human morality, forgiveness is an expected behaviour. So the question remains: what is the ethical background to his act and what does the decision to kill a defenceless enemy mean from the protagonist's and the storyteller's point of view? We shall note that the execution of dragons and its ethical consequences are not evident in all variants. We have to take those variants into account in which the protagonist, after defeating the terrible enemy, looks for another solution instead of executing the last dragon. What values and norms determine the protagonist's decision to forgive or not?



In addition, in Ámi's oeuvre there are two variants of *The King Little Michael*. Let us take a look at Ámi's solution in his versions and their ethical consequences in relation to Ámi's personal moral worldview as it is expressed through the autobiographical elements within his stories.

Ámi's outstanding art of storytelling involves the total reshaping of classic fairy tales too. One variant of *The King Little Michael* is reshaped under the title "The Dragon King Has Stolen the King's Three Daughters". In this story the protagonist is a drunkard who is introduced by Ámi as follows:

He was a thief all his life because he didn't like to work. He said: How nice it would be to regain those three princesses! I would have enough to drink then. In that case I can spend all of the King's money drinking then I would be quite old or dead. (Ámi 1968: 178)

Ámi's protagonist does not remind us of a classical hero of fairy tales. All he is focused on is getting something to drink. This character is not a novelty according to Ámi, but in this tale he is extremely accurate when elaborating drinking as a crucial characteristic of the hero. It is well known from Erdész's biography that Ámi used to tell tales in local pubs in exchange for as much drink as he wanted. We can observe the storyteller's intention in a dialogue between the protagonist and his helpmate, the tiny red mouse:

Can you hear me? I know about your longing for a woman only because she has a lot of money for you are a drunkard and you just want to drink. (Ámi 1968: 178)

There is an even more significant scene related to the drinking. The first dragon asks the protagonist about his taste in drink and he answers in a very sophisticated way:

I drink wine, and also ardent spirits, and beer and everything unless you put venom in it (ibid.).

Even though Ámi liked to use jokes in his tales in order to entertain his audience he kept the basic structure of the fairy tale. The protagonist takes the risks by venturing into the counter-world of his home and in this way the storyteller upholds the concept of the world's rescuer. Although the protagonist seems to be motivated only by the hope of drinking, by defeating the dragons he also re-establishes the world order. His steadiness is demonstrated by Ámi in the character of one of the most brutal figures of Hungarian folk tales. As we are going to see, the morality of Ámi's protagonist is not understandable within the framework of Christian ethics.

After the killing of the first dragon he minces the dead body. In this case, we can perhaps accept the process when it is interpreted by the storyteller as a prevention of the dragon's resurrection. But in the case of the second dragon that tried to outwit our hero we see that it was killed unmercifully by the drunkard.

Well I'm going to end your life! You wanted to take away my powers by using your magic! No more Mr nice guy here! I start the grinding at your legs, I put you into the grinder and start at your legs. I'll work up to your waist so you could still cry! I won't start at your head so you can pass away quickly! Let's go Zopkó – for this was the young lady's name – find your grinder and bring it to me! Zopkó ran to the cellar and brought up the grinder. They put the dragon's leg into it. Zopkó was grinding while the drunkard pushed the dragon into the grinder. The last cry of

the dragon was heard when the grinder reached its waist. And so it was minced. They found an iron box, put the dragon in it and burnt the beast. (Ámi 1968: 186)

Mincing something alive is such a brutal act that it can shed light on the question why most of the tales recorded from Ámi are not for children. Many interpreters believe that these brutal stories, and the cruelty in them, are undeniable proof of the amorality of the tales as a genre. The depiction of rudeness and cruelty in tales is always striking and applies not only to the case of Ámi. Nevertheless, our storyteller, who took part in two wars, could utilise and stylise his experiences as well as the related reading in the tales. From this viewpoint the crusher is a symbol that is suitable for annihilation the enemies. Apart from this reasoning, at this point we have to accept the very basic ethical dilemma of the tale. The dragon personifies evil, i.e. it is an entity that belongs to another world and the acts against it cannot be evaluated on the basis of human ethics. Specifically, we should understand that the protagonist's ferocious and at first slightly insane act testifies a conscious standpoint: in order to re-establish a 'good' world the hero has to be bad.

Ámi's version of *The King Little Michael* is a story that offers a special insight into understanding the multiple functions of the autobiographical elements in his storytelling. In the figure of the hero, Ámi casts himself as the authentic representative of applied ethics. King Little Michael personifies the man who has survived war and fulfilled his destiny. Ámi's storytelling, the moment of reshaping the protagonist, makes it clear in the momentary act of storytelling that the tale is a framework and a medium for the individual (for the self) to manifest itself in the Other.

## CONCLUSIONS

While acknowledging the multi-faceted nature of classical research on autobiographical motifs in folk tales, we note that Johannes Fabian's research findings in the interpretation of ethnographic narratives can also be used with benefit in the further analysis of the topic. Reading and writing start with the storyteller's self-reflexive analysis. This is an avoidable part of comprehension and a must for grasping the self in the narrated Other. Fabian's conceptual turn regarding the reinterpretation of the disciplinary status of ethnography might be understood as a methodological novelty. The significance of autobiographical motifs in Ámi's tales can be interpreted as analyses of self in the Other. This eminent conception of the Other is a key element in Ámi's tales. He functions in the tale as an alienated I (ego) and the values, beliefs, norms, news and interpretations are introduced into community discourse (i.e. the story telling community) by this autobiographically stylised storyteller. In other words, interest in the autobiographical motifs of folk tales helps us to understand the storyteller's individual personality as well as his interpretation of his community.

## NOTES

1 The interpretation of the significance of Ámi's tale for social science research can be read in detail in Biczó 2011 and 2012.

2 An extensive critical anthropological interpretation of sociocultural otherness is available in Johannes Fabian's book *Memory against Culture* (2007: 17–29).

3 The Best Man's late-comer tipsy assistant feels thirst but he can't find any water because all the rivers have dried up.

But the people, the wedding guests pissed and pooped in the same place, and there was a shit creek.

– Go my little assistant and drink there because there isn't any water except of that creek.

He went and drunk a little. But his head was dizzy, because he got drunk in the pub and he fell into the shit creek. He was suffocating, what should I do? I say to the neighbour's son:

– Shit a hook and suck it sharp-edged in order to pull him out of there. (Ámi 1968: 457)

4 Firstly it is mentioned in Péter Bornemisza's *Ördögi kísértetek* ('Evil ghosts', 1578) in the chapter "On Hearing". As far as that can be investigated, the name "King's heir" is known since 1287. As János Baronyai Decsi points out the love affair of one of the sons of the King family is "responsible" for creating the story Little King Michael. Since the second half of the 16th century the name became the signifier of a certain type of tale, namely the fabula milesia (Tarnóc 1967: 296–300).

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