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**The Problematic of Authenticity in Sándor Márai's
*Portraits of a Marriage****

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Abstract In *Portraits of a Marriage* by Sándor Márai (1900-1989), the protagonist, Peter, is portrayed as a multifaceted character who faces existential dilemmas, profound indifference and dissociation. Born into a respectable bourgeois status, Peter attempts to navigate his way through the social constraints imposed by this bourgeois standing, experiencing a severe inner rupture between the identity society expects of him and the one he desires at his core. In the course of World War II and the rigid structure of the social order that prioritizes conformity over individuality, Peter is trapped between his aspiration to reveal his true self and authentic existence and the artificial identity imposed on him. However, his search for authenticity is obstructed not only by external, societal pressures but also by his own inner feelings of insecurity, thus pushing him constantly towards inauthentic existence. In this context, the novel explores Peter's existential struggle in detail, both through his inner monologues and through his relationships with the other characters who constitute the plot of the narrative. In particular, his marriage as a member of the bourgeois and his subsequent relationship that he strives to establish with Judit fuels his existential anxieties and reveals the tension between his search for escape from the restrictions of his social identity and the authentic self he believes to exist. As Peter attempts to construct an authentic identity, he realizes that this endeavour comes with a great responsibility and inevitably necessitates isolation and alienation. Hence, the narrative unfolds Peter's existential struggle on the slippery ground of authenticity and inauthenticity. In this respect, this article examines the problematic of authenticity of Peter, the main character of Sándor Márai's novel *Portraits of a Marriage* written in 1941, from an existentialist and psychoanalytic framework. For this reason, the study will generally rely on Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre on the axis of existentialism and will utilize Jacques Lacan's concepts such as mirror phase and symbolic order where existentialism requires psychoanalytic readings.

Keywords: authenticity, inauthenticity, existentialism, psychoanalysis, Sándor Márai

Sándor Márai'nin *İşin Ash Judit ve Sonrası* Eserinde Otantiklik Sorunsalı

Öz Sándor Márai'nin (1900-1989) *İşin Ash Judit ve Sonrası* adlı romanında, eserin başkahramanı Peter varoluşsal ikilem, derin bir kayıtsızlık ve ayrışma duygularıyla yüzleşen çok yönlü bir karakter olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Saygın bir burjuva statüsüyle adeta dünyaya gelen ve bu burjuva statüsünün getirdiği sosyal kısıtlamalar arasında kendisine yol çizmeye çalışan Peter, toplumun kendisinden beklediği kimlik ile özünde olmasını arzuladığı kimlik arasında derin bir içsel bölünme yaşar. II.

Dünya savaşı süreci ve bunun getirdiği toplumsal düzenin bireysellikten ziyade uyumu önceleyen katı yapısı içinde Peter, otantik varoluşu ve hakiki benliğini ortaya çıkarma arzusuyla, kendisine dayatılan yapay kimlik arasında sıkışıp kalır. Ancak, onun otantiklik arayışı yalnızca dışsal, toplumsal baskılardan değil, aynı zamanda kendi içsel güvensizlik hissiyatları tarafından da engellenmekte, böylece onu daimî olarak inotantik bir varoluşa doğru itmektedir. Roman, bu bağlamda Peter'in varoluşsal mücadelesini hem iç monologlar yoluyla hem de anlatının ana örgüsünü oluşturan diğer karakterle kurduğu ilişkiler aracılığıyla derinlemesine işlemektedir. Özellikle bir burjuva mensubu olarak yaptığı evlilik ve sonrasında Judit ile kurmaya çalıştığı ilişki, onun varoluşsal kaygılarını körükleyen bir nitelikte olup, burjuva kimliğinin kısıtlamalarından kaçma arayışıyla var olduğuna inandığı otantik benliği arasındaki gerilimi gözler önüne sermektedir. Peter, otantik bir kimlik inşa etmeye çalıştıkça, bu çabanın da büyük bir sorumluluk getirdiğini ve kaçınılmaz olarak soyutlanma ve yabancılaşma gerektirdiğini fark eder. Dolayısıyla, roman Peter'in otantiklik-inotantiklik kaygan zeminindeki varoluş mücadelesini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu makale Sándor Márai'nin 1941 yılında yazdığı *İşin Ash Judit ve Sonrası* romanının ana karakteri Peter'in otantiklik sorunsalını varoluşçu ve psikoanalitik bir çerçeveden incelemektedir. Bu sebeple, çalışma genel olarak Martin Heidegger ve Jean Paul Sartre'ı varoluşçuluk ekseninde kendine dayanak alacak olup, varoluşçuluğun psikoanalitik okumalar gerektirdiği noktalarda ise Jacques Lacan'ın ayna evresi ve sembolik düzen gibi kavramlarından yararlanacaktır.

Anahtar sözcükler: otantiklik, inotantiklik, varoluşçuluk, psikanaliz, Sándor Márai

Introduction

Sándor Márai, considered one of Hungary's greatest writers, spent most of his life away from his native Hungary. His early teenage years coincided with the First World War, and Márai had to live the life of an immigrant at an early age due to his country's loss in the war. Márai, who was familiar with literature from an early age, focused on the lives of foreigners, immigrants, exiles, and displaced people in his writings and articles from the early 1920s. In particular, thanks to his profession as a writer and journalist, he had been to many parts of Europe and therefore carefully observed the devastation of the war, the traumas it caused to individuals and societies, and even the problems of alienation, and used these in his works. For instance, when describing the new situation of his native Hungary after the war, Márai argues that everything that was considered old has changed or disappeared, that the only novelty is the arrival of foreigners - people displaced by the war - but that, in essence, makes individuals 'alienated' (Judit, 2017, p. 2).

In addition, Márai argues that war also divides and destroys the intellectual bonds between countries and communities, which is one of the reasons why individuals become alienated not only from each other but also from themselves. So indeed Márai, concerning the experiences of displaced people who, like him, had to live in exile for a long time, states that individuals realize the ‘truth’ after a certain point and defines that point as the point at which individuals become callous to everything around them (Judit, 2017, p. 12). In fact, this is alienation itself.

In Sandor Márai’s *The Portraits of a Marriage* (1941), which will be discussed in this article, the author once more presents the readers with characters trying to survive and even exist in the shadow of a great war. In particular, this article will discuss the problematic of authenticity concerning the protagonist Peter within the light of concepts put forth by Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre, and additionally the theories of the mirror and the symbolic phase proposed by Jacques Lacan.

The Concept of Authenticity

Jean Paul Sartre’s existentialism fundamentally takes its roots from the idea of absence of God, which posits freedom of human beings as both absolute and burdensome. He expresses this human condition through his assertion that human beings are “condemned to be free”, which signifies that man is first thrown into a world that he cannot choose and then exists, and subsequently defines themselves through conscious choices (Çelebi, 2014, p. 2). This concept mainly comprises Sartre’s existential claim that “existence precedes essence” that emphasizes human beings first exist, encounter their own consciousness and, only right after that, constitute their essence through their choice. In this sense, Sartre builds his concept of authenticity around the idea that individuals must fully embrace the responsibilities present in their freedom.

Sartre’s doctrine revolves around the idea of what he calls “pure subjectivity” which was derived from Descartes’ well-known cogito “I think, therefore I am”, where consciousness recognizes its potential to go beyond the current conditions (Kierkegaard and Kaufmann, 1956, p. 1; Sartre, 1997, p. 191). In essence, the condition of authenticity demands true and lucid consciousness of one’s existential circumstances, and to accept the responsibilities consciously with all their risks inherent in them (Sartre, 1948, p. 90). Sartre underlies that these conditions here are delimiting – since human beings cannot choose the place they exist- but he claims that it is precisely this point that leads to authenticity: “When I adopt the first-person stance toward myself, I encounter myself as a consciousness that is fully engaged in free, creative activity, one that has the power to impart a meaning to the self and its world through its own choices” (Guignon, 2004, p. 73). This is literally a never-ending process in one’s life, a fact that individual must face from the very moment of

his/her existence. Conversely, Sartre's concept of "bad faith" outlines inauthentic conditions as a denial of conscious freedom because of the uncertainties or anxieties about future outcomes. In this condition, individual submits oneself predetermined norms and external factors (Sartre, 2007, p. 4-5).

Similarly, Heidegger's ideas resonate with Sartre's views within the framework of the concept of authenticity. Heidegger deepens the understanding of authenticity through his exploration of Being or Dasein. Dasein corresponds to human existence in a broad sense, but it refers to something unique in which human beings relate to their Being. More specifically, Dasein is distinguished from human existence by its capability of comprehending its own existence: "Dasein has a preliminary understanding of Being. Without it we could not understand the question 'What is Being?' nor set about answering it" (Inwood, 1997, p. 47). Unlike objects, Dasein's essence is not fixed, but lies in the very act of existing; it constantly transforms through engagement with the world. Thereby, Heidegger highlights that human beings, despite the fact that thrown into a finite and pre-established reality, continually define their existence through choices to "make sense of" particular things or situations (Withy, 2014, p. 3).

Heidegger further elaborates authenticity by distinguishing it from everyday inauthenticity as the state of Dasein's "owning its own existence", that is, the recognition and acceptance of the finite nature of existence (Inwood, 1997, p. 51). One of the primary ways Dasein to achieve authentic existence is to embrace its mortality and eliminate the external factors that suppress the authentic self. In general, everyday life or everydayness, is characterized by conformity to societal norms, which constitute and represent a state of 'inauthentic existence'. Authenticity, therefore, emerges as an active confrontation with this everydayness. Heidegger describes this condition clearly: "The Self of everyday Dasein is they-self¹, which we distinguish from the authentic Self" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 129). Although this process takes place in much the same way as in Sartre's view, Heidegger adds that Dasein confronts possibilities as much as the free choices it makes and that in the process Dasein runs the risk of encountering notions of anxiety and the inevitability of death (Göncüoğlu, 2020, p. 512). However, for Heidegger, these are not an obstacle to authentic life, but on the contrary, they constitute the stepping stones to reach authenticity.

Both Sartre and Heidegger's ideas converge on the idea that authenticity reveals through conscious self-recognition and genuine choices that challenge pre-established, imposed societal roles and

¹ They-self refers to a state in which Dasein co-exists with other Daseins, which is one of the preconditions of Heidegger's definition of being.

identities. These existential points offer a significant framework to analyse the complex inner struggles of Peter, the protagonist of *The Portraits of a Marriage*, since he grapples with authenticity and inauthenticity amidst social constraints and his existential anxieties.

Discussion

Portraits of a Marriage centres on Peter, a member of the bourgeois or middle class living in a country in the heart of Central Europe. Peter is an individual who finds himself in his family's bourgeois class as soon as he is born and is raised according to the customs of that class. On the eve of the Second World War, he has reached middle age and, like all the other members of his social class, has become a bourgeois with his expected marriage fitting for his societal life. But Peter is not satisfied with his life and is in a constant search, even though everything seems to be fine from the outside. From the Heideggerian and Sartrean point of view, Peter lacks the authenticity that gives meaning to his existence, and for this reason, he is alienated from the identity he was born into and strives to reach an authentic life. In this section, this study will discuss the dynamics that shape the inner world of Peter, who tries to give meaning to his existence on the ground of authenticity-inauthenticity through the choices he makes and will make. In this context, in order to understand Peter's life, the narrative introduces us to three people besides Peter: first his first wife Ilonka and his writer friend Lazar, and then Judit, the housemaid of Peter's household.

In the first part of the narrative, one can see Peter in his marriage to his first wife. Peter is born into a bourgeois class in Hungary, referred to as the upper middle class. This class is a typical extension of European culture, where every aspect of life is structured both internally (private life) and externally (public space). Therefore, Peter, like all the other family members, is a person shaped and raised in a bourgeois culture.

Peter, who is required to marry due to his social standing, marries Ilonka, a traditional, bourgeois woman like himself. However, even though they are of the same social status, the two are completely different from each other in terms of both intellectual and aesthetic tastes. For this reason, this marriage leads to Peter's dissatisfaction and alienation. Since Peter is a bourgeois in the true sense of the word, the couple are really mismatched in terms of social standing. Ilonka highlights this difference as follows: "He did read a lot, "systematically"—his favourite word — a little too systematically for my taste. I read passionately, according to mood. He read as though he were carrying out one of life's important duties [...] Reading was a religious obligation for him: he valued letters as highly as priests do relics." (Márai, 2012, p. 7). The main discrepancy here is also seen in their intellectual tastes and their understanding of culture: "He was like that with pictures

too, and with museums, theatres, and concerts” (p. 7). For Peter, intellectual tastes or pursuits are an expression of his bourgeois identity, while for Ilonka they are more individual and spontaneous. The gap between their social status is revealed when Peter subtly hints to Ilonka that she is not a real bourgeois: “I am an artist,” he says, implying that if Ilonka had been raised as bourgeois she would already understand his lifestyles and passions. Peter’s subtle arrogance here demonstrates that Peter’s alienation stems not only from his marriage to Ilonka but also from the identity he is supposed to assume. Ilonka seems to sense this discrepancy by saying, “As if he had constantly to be apologizing for something; as if he were at a loss in some matter and required help” (p. 7). However, it must be said that the discrepancy here actually poses a fundamental problem for Peter’s self-identity, and the readers get the first signs of this in a casual conversation with Ilonka about chair covers during their marriage. Peter says that the colour of the chair covers Ilonka bought is “tiring, vulgar and shrill”, and politely asks her to buy new ones. Ilonka resents this and describes the cultural difference and disparity between them as follows:

“What he wanted to say was something that could never be said directly, in plain, simple words: that there was a gulf in culture between us, that his world was not mine; that though I knew everything and had learned all there was to learn, that though I was middle-class, just as he was, my circumstances were — in tiny but vital details — different from those he had loved and had gotten used to” (p. 7).

This cultural gap and the inability to be Peter’s equal, even through marriage, is the driving force behind Peter’s alienation from his bourgeois identity. Therefore, his dissatisfaction in his marriage - in fact, the embodiment of an identity he deeply resents – hints his growing existential awareness because, in Sartrean terms, this dissatisfaction represents his imminent recognition of bad faith inherent in his pre-established identity which he accepted unknowingly being born into it. In a similar vein, Heidegger’s notion everydayness sheds light on his condition as well. Peter’s unease demonstrates his inner struggle against the conformity to social order situated in everydayness, which indicates a longing to gain his authentic self from the pressures of societal expectations. Thus, his discontent presents strong evidence that he’s beginning to confront the inauthentic situation of his existence, and surely his desire for authentic existence.

In this context, one of the people who constitutes the main pillars of Peter’s authentic search is undoubtedly his writer friend Lazar. He stands out in the narrative as both a confidant in Peter’s search for authenticity and an idealized version of the self that Peter essentially desires. Lazar’s presence in Peter’s social life offers him a choice of life and freedom that is completely in contrast to the traditional bourgeois life in which he leads. For Peter, Lazar represents a self that he can

integrate with, a self that can provide him with the existential and intellectual ideals that he has always lacked in his own life but hoped to find.

The relationship between Peter and Lazar is almost like a master-slave relationship in which Lazar has a mystical possession over Peter's psyche. This influence becomes obvious one day when Ilonka finds Peter with Lazar in a bizarre game that is completely under the control of Lazar. In this troubling scenario, Ilonka is completely out of the game, Lazar is Ilonka's new husband and Peter is in a completely submissive role. This game emphasizes the extent of Lazar's dominance over Peter and leads Peter to reveal Lazar's role in his own life. For him, Lazar plays the role of "witness", both as a proof of Peter's existence and as someone who constantly demands validation: "...everything we did was, to some extent, done for this witness: it was he who had to be convinced, it was to him we had to prove something. Our careers, the great struggles of our individual lives, were all, first and foremost, for the witness's benefit [...] He knows something about us that no one else does." (Márai, 2012, p. 9). This witness-being that Peter speaks of with a kind of admiration is undoubtedly the ideal self that Peter is trying to reach inwardly, subconsciously. In Lacanian terms, Lazar represents the 'Other'² Peter sees in the mirror, and this Other, the witness, is someone who promises him a unity to his existence. However, at the same time, Lazar is a disruptive force concerning Peter's sense of self and, in the Lacanian sense, a role that further defines his divided (fragmented), incomplete self and sustains his desire to fill this gap. Indeed, at this point, it must be said that while Lazar offers Peter a glimpse of more authentic self, his strong power over Peter alienates him from his bourgeois - that is, social - identity. The more he tries to seek for his ideal, authentic self and attempts to emulate Lazar in this case, the more artificial and meaningless his bourgeois identity becomes. The tension that arises from this, that is, the desire to achieve an authentic self and life and the fact that he cannot fully break away from his social roles, puts him in a constant state of inner conflict.

When this game scenario is evaluated in the context of authenticity, Peter's succumbing to his subconscious desire and complying with Lazar's invitation means, in the Sartrean sense, a choice freely made in the opposite direction, instead of a choice that he should normally reject according to social norms. As one may recall, Sartre argues that authenticity is achieved when individuals consciously choose to act in accordance with their true desires (Sartre, 1948, p. 90). Here, Peter's

² The phenomenon referred to at this point is the process Lacan calls the mirror stage. In this phase, the individual sees his own imaginary, perfectly formed image in the mirror and admires it. But this image is an 'other' that is alien to him even though it looks like him (Lacan, 2005, p. 1).

unusual submissiveness to Lazar can be interpreted as a radical, authentic act because this sole act is violating bourgeois expectations. Therefore, this act forces Peter to confront the freedom inherent in the choice he would make. With this conscious choice, Peter surely moves towards authenticity, as he willingly goes against his socially constructed role and traces an alternative possibility.

In the Heideggerian sense, this choice Peter makes is an act of creating an authentic potentiality as Dasein. Heidegger emphasizes that authentic existence reveals precisely when Dasein recognizes and confronts the inauthentic conformity of everydayness in which individuals are bounded with specific roles and expectations come with them (Heidegger, 1962, p. 129). Peter's willingness to accept Lazar's invitation shows us his desire to pursue his true feelings by stepping away from his socially sanctioned roles, that is, his effort to reach his Dasein's desire for authentic life. Peter wants to free himself from the trap of his inauthentic bourgeois identity and the rules of social life formed by other Daseins in a broad sense. Consequently, this moment is crucial for Peter in reclaiming his individuality.

The feeling of alienation and the existential dilemma of Peter deepens with the death of his son. Ilonka observes that Peter found real happiness during the birth of their child, a rare moment where he seemed at peace briefly with the world. For Peter, the birth of his son was a chance to find a meaning to his existence through a genuine bond, something he had been denied by his forced marriage due to his social status and expectations. However, with the death of his son, this potential bond and the meaning that comes with it, has been completely lost. "But he would, up to a point at least, for a while, have made his peace with the world for the sake of the child. I could see him struggling with himself... He was trying to change his nature, to domicile it the way a circus trainer tames a lion. Silent and proud and sad as he was..." (Márai, 2012, p. 13). The possibility of Peter's reconciliation with the world and the effort he puts in for the sake of the child clearly reflects his existential dilemma. Peter's inner struggle, also noticed by Ilonka, can be read in Heideggerian terms as a confrontation with his authenticity for Peter, because with the birth of the child, Peter began to oscillate between authenticity and inauthenticity. Peter's attempts to behave well toward Ilonka and his son are efforts to conform to the expectations of society (inauthentic by nature), which create an illusion of happiness. However, these actions contrast with his deep desires for his authentic self, which deepens his inner conflict. The presence of the child temporarily alleviates Peter's existential isolation. This is both a bond that gives meaning to his existence and a tangible justification for his reconciliation with the world and identity into which

he is thrown. However, this “change of identity” is achieved through self-giving, in other words, the process of “a circus trainer tames a lion” is completely contradictory to his intrinsic desires.

From a Sartrean perspective, Peter’s inner struggle can be read as a father to be assumed ‘for the sake of the child’, and in a broader sense, the traditional parental role can be read as an external, artificial burden of responsibility that societal roles and identities impose on Peter’s own existence. The desire for reconciliation with these means, in Sartrean terms, choosing a path of bad faith or inauthenticity, a choice that deepens Peter’s inner conflict. In the end, Peter’s existence takes such a blow with the death of the child that his isolation and alienation are exacerbated: “it was as if he were merely tolerating me in his house, in his very life. There was patience and tolerance in his manner, but it was as though he had no choice in that matter, and he’d simply resigned himself to living with me...” (Márai, 2012, p. 12). Ilonka’s very existence is now a burden because Peter’s own deepening loneliness was already a burden: “He was sad and solitary...he was beyond anyone’s help, even mine” (Márai, 2012, p. 13). As Ilonka emphasizes here, Peter is in fact not only alone, he is now ‘solitary’.

After his child’s death, Peter retreats further into his shell, considering Ilonka’s love as a burden. He married due to societal values imposed on him, and even being loved feels overwhelming to him: “I don’t feel a great need to be loved...” (Márai, 2012, p. 18). He even asks Ilonka to love him less: “...I can’t surrender myself to feeling...try to love me a little less...Your heart must let me go...I can’t live under conditions of such emotional tension” (Márai, 2012, p. 18-19). These words reflect his struggle for authentic life. Ilonka’s love feels like an existential trap, obstructing his self-recognition and freedom, and risks confining Peter into an undesired identity, fuelling his alienation. From Sartrean and Heideggerian perspectives, Peter seeks freedom to define his own existence, wanting to escape bad faith and societal impositions to achieve authenticity. His statement “I cannot surrender myself to feeling...” highlights, in this context, his anxiety about inauthenticity, striving to find a place on authentic ground. Moreover, this is essentially the state of being caught up in the world and mundane concerns to the extent that the individual is alienated from his or her authentic self. To put it more precisely, surrendering to emotions is the loss of one’s own self and existence in the mundane norms into which one is completely thrown, and ultimately becoming like everybody else (Daseins in the Heideggerian sense). At this point, due to the anxiety he experiences in order not to fall into this inauthentic situation, he intellectually refers to the significance of such feelings and strives to find a place for himself on authentic ground.

The symbolic reflection of Peter's deepening loneliness appears in the narrative in Michelangelo's Pieta statue, which is essentially a powerful representation of what Peter aspires to:

“...that wonderful sculptural group with four figures in the Duomo [...] the Pietà [...] The face there was a human face without desire, without anger, a face purged by fire, one that knew everything and wanted nothing, not even revenge, not even to forgive — nothing, absolutely nothing... That this was ultimate human perfection, this sacred indifference, this absolute solitude and deafness to both joy and sorrow ...” (Márai, 2012, p. 26).

The expression “human face without desire, without anger” combined with Peter's earlier statement “I can't surrender myself feeling...” clearly proves that he aspires to reach an authentic existence, untainted by artificiality, of the burdens of bourgeois upbringing. The statue is the embodiment of an authentic life and purity that transcends the worldly expectations and sufferings of social ties, that is, sociality.

Within the perspective of Heidegger, the way to reach the condition that Peter calls “ultimate human perfection” is to turn to a way of life that is completely detached from the concerns of daily life, which is everydayness. His remarks such as “absolute solitude and deafness to both joy and sorrow...” are the peace that comes from living on such an authentic ground. In Sartrean terms, this “absolute solitude” evokes the state of being “condemned to freedom” because the way to find the authentic ground is to break away from the external or imposed identities. The detachment that leads to this individuality has a liberating effect. Likewise, Lacan's perspective sees the statue as the unattainable ‘Other’-Peter's idealized self that he desires but cannot achieve- which urges him further seeking for authenticity. Peter's aforementioned expression concerning statue as “human face without desire, without anger” is also significant in the Lacanian perspective as this statue with these qualities represents an ideal ego, purified from social constraints, emotional conflicts of human beings and symbolic webs of culture and language that limit one. Thereby, for Peter, the statue is a mirror image which stands for his deepest and pure longing for a coherent self which he first perceived in Lazar and now sees in the Pieta statue. However, the symbolic order, which Lacan calls as the social, cultural, and linguistic networks that are already present before the birth of the individual, into which the individual is born (Lacan, 2001, p. 1), constantly mediates Peter's desires and prevents him to reach his idealized self. Thus, this statue paradoxically both stands for his desired authentic ground and the very source of his deepening alienation, which underscores the problematic of his fragmented existence.

One of the main reasons why Peter is struggling on the slippery ground is revealed through Lazar's confession. Lazar acknowledges that his influence over Peter was shared with Judit Aldoza, a woman from Peter's past whose presence still wields strong power over him. Judit, who symbolizes

Peter's second idealized self, embodies both a source of inspiration and an existential threat which create a deep internal conflict for him.

For Peter, Judit's presence has almost the same effect as Lazar. At first, just a housemaid, Judit transforms in Peter's eyes during a single, seemingly insignificant moment. One Christmas day, Peter experiences an epiphany seeing Judit by the fireplace and perceives an idealized purity he has never known: he senses a stationary, primal part of himself – sleeping beast- awakening (Márai, 2012, p. 84). In this sense, Judit is an entity that activates Peter's innermost parts, representing a unity that he lacks in his bourgeois life, in Lacan's terms, present in their most perfect and complete form in the mirror in the imaginary order. Apparently from that moment onwards, for Peter, Judit symbolizes an idealized unity that Peter believes he lacks due to his bourgeois identity. He imagines Judit can provide the pure, unspoiled unity of body and soul. However, Peter's intense attachment to Judit causes a deep rift between his social identity and his idealized self. Even Judit's memories begin to hurt him, and he attempts to take drastic measures:

“He has done everything possible. You have no idea how much effort it has been for him these past years. You could move mountains with the strength he has spent in denying that memory. [...] Do you know what he was doing? He was consciously trying to alienate himself from his feelings. It was like someone talking and reasoning with a stick of dynamite, persuading it not to go off” (Márai, 2012, p. 36).

In both the Heideggerian and Sartrean sense, his desire to purge himself off his feelings and memories of her reveal his avoidance of authentic existence. With this choice of repressing the authentic feelings, Peter seeks refuge in the superficial security of everydayness and falls into a trap of bad faith. This way, he avoids the existential anxiety that authentic existence necessitates it. At the same time, from a Lacanian perspective, Peter's attempt to break his bond with Judit reflects his conflict between social identity and his idealized self. Since Judit represents his second idealized self, an embodiment of authentic identity, her persistent presence would be a huge treat for his existential struggle within the symbolic order. The idealized, imaginary image of Judit promises integrity for Peter, but at the same time, it has a potential to disrupt his identity which could increase his dissonance and alienates him in his social life by widening the gap between who he is (his social identity) and who he wants to be. Thus, the act of forgetting outlines his tragic condition on the slippery ground of authenticity and inauthenticity.

Peter eventually marries Judit, whom he believes to be pure given the social class to which she once belonged, in order to achieve authentic life and self, but the Judit he knew as the housemaid of their house is no longer the old Judit. She is now an impure individual, acculturated by the very sociality that Peter essentially hates and desperately wants to escape from: “The face you saw was

only a mask, a dramatic mask for a character in a play. When I first saw it, the face was open, full of expectation and patience, radiant and open [...] The face grew more solemn later, graver and more solemn. The eyes became more watchful..." (Márai, 2012, p. 64). Therefore, from both Sartrean and Heideggerian perspectives, Judit has eaten the 'poisonous fruit' of the social and fallen into the clutches of the ordinary, that is, inauthenticity of they-self. In this sense, Judit's transformation signifies the contamination of the untainted ideal represented by Michelangelo's statue before. Her once "radiant, and open" countenance -which symbolizes a primordial, untouched purity that Peter longed- is now replaced by "a dramatic mask" burdened with cultural knowledge and artificiality that comes along with it. Judit thus becomes a disruptive force which penetrates and shatters Peter's closed, hermetic space. From a Lacanian perspective, Judit's transformation in this context is the result of the influence of the symbolic order dominated by linguistic and cultural norms. Peter's desire to marry with Judit was about to capture her idealized form through which he could overcome the symbolic alienation he experienced. However, her transformation reminds him the impossibility of his idealized dream. Therefore, Peter's existence has once again suffered a major blow in terms of reaching an authentic life and self, pushing him into a deep, existential loneliness.

Indeed, the profound meaning of this loneliness for Peter is the point at which he confronts the phenomenon of 'nothingness'. The context of it represents for Peter the culmination of his loneliness and alienation such that it is the point where the individual performs an act of leave-taking: "But there comes the point when your soul overflows with the desire for solitude, when all you want is, quietly, with a proper human dignity, to prepare yourself for the end, for the last human task of all: for death" (Márai, 2012, p. 101). In the act of embracing death, which he considers as a final task, Peter essentially confronts the ultimate principle of human existence: his finitude. For Peter, this act, which he describes as a final task and journey, is also the ultimate point of his hope to find an authentic life: "In the end one must be alone... [...] And you want to live alone, to live without a purpose, to render up everything to those who have a right to it, and then to leave; to wash your soul clear and wait" (Márai, 2012, p. 102). From the existentialist perspective, this ultimate point is the point at which the individual confronts his finitude. In the Sartrean context, it is the point at which the individual ascribes meaning to his existence by making a free choice with a pure consciousness, and Peter makes a free choice in this regard. Similarly, in the Heideggerian context, Heidegger argues that an individual as Dasein confronts his finitude with a full realization of his transience, as an effort to reach the ground of authentic existence by getting

rid of all the artificialities dictated by the inauthentic condition³ (Watts, 2011, p. 95). In this sense, Peter's desire to embrace death emphasizes this determination.

Peter's determination is echoed further in both his own and Judit's words: "He said, "I'm leaving, because I'm superfluous: it is me that is the one too many." I saw him just once more [...] the way people do when they are absolutely certain where they are going — that's to say, to their own annihilation" (Márai, 2012, p. 159-160). In a state of self-conscious acquiescence, Peter goes to embrace the emptiness that could define his authentic existence. Peter's recognition of his own existence as 'superfluous' signifies his complete detachment from his inauthentic societal role, because despite all the failures on the slippery ground of authenticity-inauthenticity, Peter still strives to reach the authentic self-inherent in his existence.

Conclusion

By using the historical trauma of the 20th century's greatest war and the ingrained cultural continuity of the bourgeois class of past centuries as the backdrop for his narrative, Sandor Márai brings the problematic of authenticity to the forefront. Through the existential struggles of the protagonist Peter and his relationships with other characters, the novel transcends mere personal narrative, in essence, it becomes a narrative that reveals how identity, culture, and historical conditions intertwine and affect the individuals' understanding of the authentic self. In this context, the fact that the novel was written in 1941 is a significant element that reveals the author's main intention, since the search for authenticity seems to be the only way for individuals in a world that has begun to lose its mission of providing meaning, which is the main emphasis placed on at this point. In an increasingly absurd and artificial world, - either through traditions such as the bourgeois system or through mechanized human relations following the progress of modernity - individuals try to compensate for the facts of purity or perfection that they cannot find in the world, in other words, in external reality, with their aspiration to attain their authentic selves that they assume to be within them, just as Peter.

Indeed, Peter's inability to attain the authentic life and self he seeks indicates, in a broader context, to a critique of social institutions and the cultural identities produced within this framework. Furthermore, identities imposed by bourgeois norms and such cultural systems alienate individuals from authentic possibilities (self, life, etc.). Following this point on, rather than merely depicting a character's existential conflict, the narrative implicitly questions the viability of an authentic existence within rigid social frameworks, which suggests that authenticity, although desired and

³ The notion referred to here is Being-towards-death proposed by Martin Heidegger.

pursued, is constantly mediated, and disrupted by historical and cultural realities. Consequently, Peter's story points to a universal human condition in which authenticity, while fundamental to self-realization, is permanently shaped by the historical moment and cultural milieu in which one exists.

In conclusion, Peter's journey towards an authentic self and life, in a broad sense, emphasizes the necessity to contemplate the question of authenticity in broader contexts - social, cultural, and historical- in existential discussions. This is why the issue of authenticity is given particular attention and discussed in detail.

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