

Within and Without the Border: On Géza Kállay's Last Book

(Review: *Mondhatunk-e többet? Nyelv, irodalom, filozófia.*
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I am reading the book of a friend. I am reading essays about language and the relationships among language, literature, and philosophy. I am enthralled by the style, I am immersed in the world of the writer's idiosyncratic learning and thinking, I am introduced to literary intertextualities and philosophical reflections. I am fascinated by what I am reading; questions, counterarguments, further problems occur to me, one after the other. All the more reason to pick up the phone and call my friend and say: "Hey, I've read your book, and, there are no two ways about it, it is really amazing! It is engaging, I've learnt a lot from it, and I have lots of questions, comments, refutations. We need to meet up to talk it over. We need to think about and discuss the possibilities of a metaphysical reading of Shakespeare, the limits of language, or the moral responsibility of intellectuals today. You opened up new trails to explore the relation of literature and philosophy, we would need to widen these into paths. When are you free?" My friend died unexpectedly more than a year ago, and his book came out posthumously. The talk needs to be postponed (perhaps for ever), my enthusiasm remains stuck in me, and so is the desire to think together. The best I can do is to write down my impressions of the book.

Géza Kállay was professor at the School of English and American Studies at ELTE, his main area of research being English Renaissance Literature and Shakespeare. He started out as a linguist, teaching at ELTE's Department of Applied Linguistics for two years. He had an intense relation to philosophy on many counts, he ran a course together with László Tengelyi, he translated

one of Tengelyi's books into English.¹ Moreover, thanks to a Fulbright grant, he studied with Stanley Cavell at Harvard. The two of them also became friends. In the course of his life, Kállay acquired an enormous literary and philosophical learning, immersed in both the Anglo-Saxon (analytical) and the Continental (existentialist and phenomenological) traditions of philosophy. Beside Shakespeare's work, his main professional interest lay in exploring the relationship of literature and philosophy. This interest is the earmark of his last volume as well.

The title of the volume is *Mondhatunk-e többet? Nyelv, irodalom, filozófia* (Can We Say More? Language, Literature, Philosophy). The title is not meant to suggest that the author has exhausted the subject. Although the volume is a substantial addition and perhaps capstone to an *oeuvre* of more than 10 books and 150 papers, the question refers to the limits of language. "Can we say more?" is a philosophical question *par excellence*, asking if one can say more than one can say in words. What can be expressed in language, and is there anything that limits the act of saying and the possibility of saying something? The articulation of this problem comes from one of Géza Kállay's favourite authors, Ludwig Wittgenstein. According to Wittgenstein, the world is not a composite of things but a composite of facts. Language can only make *statements* about facts intelligibly; therefore, the "reality" beyond factual statements is not part of the world. As the boundaries of the world and language are the same, one cannot and should not talk about any "reality" beyond the world.

The essay "Can We Say More?" compares Wittgenstein's theory of language in *Tractatus* with Camus's *The Stranger* (*L'Étranger*). Kállay points out specific similarities between Camus's literary language use and Wittgenstein's language philosophy. The protagonist, Mersault only makes statements, while the "reality" beyond those statements, like human emotions or ethical values (not to mention theology), are not to be attributed meaning at all. It appears that Mersault speaks according to Wittgenstein's early linguistic imperative. As Kállay points out, however, not even the text of the *Tractatus* itself fulfils its own expectations, as it continually crosses the strict boundary between language and "reality" set up by itself. Incidentally, this is exactly the way Camus uses language in *The Stranger*. Boundary crossing is produced not by the semantic or syntactic but pragmatic dimension of these texts. As Kállay writes: "You need not talk about ethics: you need to perform it, embody it, make it happen" (291). So, in Kállay's reading these texts are

1 Tengelyi, László. *The Wild-Region of Life History*. Trans. Géza Kállay. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004.

balancing on the border of the sayable and the non-sayable, and this ability to balance gives them potential. They become fascinating at the point where they do not fulfil Wittgenstein's language imperative any more. In the whole volume, Kállay is involved in finding more about the "additional" quality literary and philosophical texts share compared to what they actually say.

All the essays of the volume attempt to disentangle some non-sayable additional quality in literary and philosophical texts through analysing connections between literature and philosophy. More specifically, Kállay reads literary texts through philosophy and supplements philosophical reflections with literary examples. Whilst doing this, he crosses the disciplinary boundaries of literary and philosophical inquiry continually. He keeps asking what differentiates literature from philosophy and what links them. He locates the link in the non-sayable "more" he detects in both.

The first two sections of the volume make up a book within the book, because all the essays here deal with Shakespeare. The titles situate the texts in a philosophical context at the outset: "Shakespeare: Space and Time" or "A Metaphysical reading of Shakespeare." Had this part appeared separately, it would have made an excellent Shakespeare monograph. Had it been published in English, it would surely become an indispensable piece of the interpretative trend that reads Shakespeare in a philosophical context, which is surveyed in detail in "Metaphysical reading of Shakespeare: Emmanuel Levinas, Macbeth, and contemporary Shakespeare criticism" (158–160). The two chapters are composed of nine readings that concentrate on the dramas *Macbeth* (which had been translated by Kállay into Hungarian recently),² *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Richard II*, and *Richard III* and philosophical works by Kierkegaard, Lévinas, László Tengelyi, Wittgenstein, and, of course, Stanley Cavell.

Kállay poses the question why one needs philosophy to comment on a literary text. He suggests that there are several ways to explicate the relation between literature and philosophy through Shakespeare's texts specifically. Firstly, one can study the impact of late Renaissance philosophy on Shakespeare. Secondly, one can claim that an additional level of significance to the texts can be articulated through philosophical arguments. And thirdly, one can study how diverse philosophers reflect on Shakespeare. Kállay's essays combine the second and third approaches. Stanley Cavell's *Disowning Knowledge: In Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge University Press, 1987) is a major influence on his work, and he also analyses the layers of meaning implicit in Kierkegaard's, Lévinas', and Tengelyi's references to Shakespeare.

2 Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Trans. Géza Kállay. Budapest: Liget Műhely, 2014. Web. 25 Feb 2019.

At the same time, he reinvests the philosophical considerations into his literary analyses and unearths ideas related to the philosophy of language, ethics, existential philosophy, and phenomenology in Shakespeare's texts. His analyses show how complicated and complex the relations between philosophical and literary discourses are. The two areas are not related like two countries: rather, their borders meet and then separate, they sometimes merge into each other, and sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the two at all. The link between them is the additional "more" they articulate and this makes them mutually dependent on each other.

In the second part of the volume Shakespeare appears only rarely. The third section, entitled "The burden of storytelling" consists of diverse essays: literary theory, philosophical commentary on the *Tractatus*, a literary exegesis of Kosztolányi's *Skylark*, and the essay on the Wittgenstein/Camus connection. The last section is called the "Responsibility for the Word." The title itself refers to that something "more" added to a certain language use. When one speaks, one has to be able to tell the reason why one speaks about something, and why one does not speak about something else. Speaking or remaining silent carries an ethical dimension in itself. There are two essays on language philosophy in the section: one on Saussure and one on directions in language philosophy in general. Both are concerned with the problem that language denotes more than it appears to. Although language is acquired in a community, the system of linguistic signs is passed on to us as ready-made, it has its distinct semantics and syntax, yet language also opens up the play of infinite jest for each of its users. The significance of literary and philosophical discourses may be that through their conceptual frames, poetics, and creativity they expose a concealed potential of language, they are able to articulate contents beyond predetermined syntactic or semantic categories.

The final essay, called "The higher law: Emerson and Fugitive Slaves" functions as a fitting conclusion to the book. In relation to Emerson, Kállay writes about the ethical responsibility of intellectuals for—and their obligation to—people in need who are subject to obvious injustice. In one of his speeches Emerson addresses an ambiguity inherent in US political, legal, and social structures since the second part of the eighteenth century: whilst the Declaration of Independence clearly states that all men are created equal, in the Southern states of the country the institution of slavery remains the basis of the economy. This ambiguity sheds light on an obvious injustice that confronted all US citizens with a choice. Emerson argues that in this decision one needs to respect a "higher law": the law of conscience

that safeguards freedom, equality and human dignity against slavery. Géza Kállay is aware that this argumentation does not only sound naïve today but also sounded naïve to some at the time it was articulated. Already then, it could only resonate with those who had already been convinced of human goodwill and the possibility of change. That is why he asks twice about the point of referring to this law in a speech that argues for the abolition of slavery. What is the point of talking about justice, freedom, and goodwill in a community in which self-interest, injustice, and evil obviously triumph?

In the conclusion of this essay, Kállay summarises the whole volume, answering the question whether one can say “more”:

... honest words still have some power for some. Despite your numerous doubts about the justice of your own words, despite your knowledge of the fragmented nature of your speech, some of what you say can be communicated if it is formulated comprehensively, concisely, clearly, and there will always be someone who will hear it. Freedom, compassion, goodwill, and truth are not only words but can become thoughts, actions, and realities. (351)

So, language points beyond itself, it tells more than it says, and that additional “more” belongs to the sphere of ethics: it is act and action. In literary and philosophical texts, one will find not only descriptions of possible worlds or theoretical representations of the real world but a peculiar additional quality, as they create culture and provide instruction in how we are to live a life worth living. This additional quality links literature and philosophy.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Tamás Pavlovits is associate professor of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Szeged. He holds a DEA and a PhD from the Université de Paris-Sorbonne. His research covers the history of seventeenth-century philosophy, ethics, and phenomenology. His earlier work includes monographs on Blaise Pascal, in both French and Hungarian (*Le rationalisme de Pascal*, 2007; *Blaise Pascal: A természettudománytól a vallási apológiáig*, 2010; *Mi egy ember a végtelenben?* *Pascal-tanulmányok*, 2012), as well as six edited volumes on various aspects of seventeenth-century continental philosophy.