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ISTVÁN PETELEI, THE COGNIZABLE WRITER

**Biographical legends, reception history,
text analyses**

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF LITERARY STUDIES

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1. Antecedents of the research and the identification of the problem

In my thesis I would like to address the short stories adaptation and reception history of István Petelei (1852-1910), who was born in Transylvania. My attention was raised by Károly Alexa during my university studies, first while I was working on a project to a seminar I was impressed by the atmosphere, the strong psychology, the masterful structures and the deep tragic of Petelei's work. Although my university thesis was written about a contemporary writer, Miklós Mészöly's novel *The Forgiveness*, and that research was brought me closer to the genre of prose.

I returned examining his novels in 2008 when I was passed into the Doctoral School of Literary Studies. In the last 10 years twelve studies of mine appeared about the writer's work, which he had written while he was alive, and about those biographical topos which were coming back from time to time in his biography. I gave twelve lectures about the topics, most of them were in the conferences of John von Neumann University (earlier College of Kecskemét), where I got a lot of help and understanding attention from the organizers, tutors, participants and from the members of the Linguistic and Literary Research Workshop who raised me between themselves in 2012.

During this time my related plans went through a considerable transformation with my doctoral dissertation. In the first few years I had an interest in the prose poetics investigation and

I wanted to deal with genre poetic questions. While I was digging deeper to the autobiography of Petelei I had realized that in the Petelei reception I was truly interested in the approach of the genre poetic view. That is why the specialized literature promised some new perspectives to introduce the reception, when and how determined Petelei's short stories and lead to the practical philological approach to introduce the collecting and analyzing of the datas of István Petelei's short stories. With the help of this introduction and also mapping the canon story was forming in the last hundred years. After that I tried to supplement the images that were created about the canons with the lay interpretative community's canon creation endeavours, too.

Beside these and going through the specialized literature I was getting more and more interested in those biographical cliches, legends which can't stand their ground but they had become the key in the interpretations of Petelei's short stories. One of them is that Petelei is a kind of unknown writer to the public opininon moreover, the readers can't have a contact with his job. The other key is his special choice for his topics and the individual atmosphere can be explained with the writer's health condition which silenced him for several times.

That urged me to try and collect those inaccuracies which returned in the review about Petelei. On the other hand making a diverse quantitative examination and the communications of his short stories arranged into searchable tables I tried my best to deduct inferences, being based on facts in connection with the short story

oeuvre.

However, beside that it was important to experiment with the methods of the cognition on Petelei's short stories. I tried to enforce a new viewpoint so I was doing my poetical, retorical and other experiments of mine on a closed corpus which was done on Petelei's volumes which were edited during his lifetime.

My choice of subject and the works of my paper were determined by three sources and they were crucial to study Petelei's oeuvre. The first source was Dezső Kozma's work in 1969, which was considered an outstarter. *The Transylvanian Novelist: István Petelei* was the only monographic adaptation about Petelei which directed my attention to Petelei's oeuvre multigenre like position and because of the birth place it sticked to a regional character because of the formation place in his attitude and his universal oeuvre. The second source was Györgyi Pozsvai's studies inconnection with Petelei's short stories which presented the new interpretations of paradigm-changing. The last source was Zsuzsa Török whose work appeared in 2011 named *István Petelei and the Press Medium: Media and Society Analysis*. This monographie brought a new horizon in the Petelei reception. Thanks to her all of Petelei's short story were published by her in a critical edition which based the biography onto a new level.

2. The construction of the observed methodology and the dissertation

In the two main parts of my dissertation I had to select different methods. In the Petelei reception story's first part I was dealing with a philological method fundamentally. I dealt with genre poetics questions symbolically only, with what I would have liked executing tasks that may bring up new viewpoints and it may be helped the Petelei's short story corpus to put into new contextualisation. That was the reason why I have made micro-philological, statistical and quantitative researches which may serve as a basis to the demonstration of the changes in the Petelei canon. In the second part of the paper on the other hand I made various hermeneutics methods (rhetoric, narratology stb.) and I even made poetics examinations.

In the first part of my paper I confronted the related reception story of Petelei with the legendary facts. I reviewed the components of the obscurity of Petelei which was kept recalling often, I presented the most important facts of his career until anonymity and the related biographical topos of him. I examined the biographies written about the author in the past century, encyclopedia articles, Internet data mediums, I took it one after the other and I corrected their wrong data, I presented the mistakes' influence on each other, and on the all-time readers of Petelei and onto the analysts of the short stories of Petelei.

I examined the contact of Petelei and the Hungarian education

in detail, I also analysed a press debate happened after the 2008 school leaving exam which were circled around the details of the work of Petelei. I took those opinions into consideration beside the statements of the literature, which can be bound to the lay interpretative community, to the all-time readers. (I mean the substance of the Internet community sides, forums and communication changes).

I gathered it in order to be allowed to deduct new inferences in connection with the oeuvre, I arranged it and I analysed all the appearance data of István Petelei's short stories. I set the related data in tables with the volumes and short story appearances aiming for completeness in my enclosures. I gave full bibliography to the books, appeared in a shape for his works, I presented his work which was published during his lifetime and posthumously published books, I made searchable all the datas of the press appearance of some short story volumes. I outlined his working method which can be reconstructed leaning on the author's letter. From these, some important statements of the previous criticisms and studies were found out in the mirror of his assumptions with the literary activity of Petelei, and also its evenness, richness, concerned inconnection with the working method of him.

I dealt with the question as a looking out, into a what kind of genre and subgenre can be enumerated to the short stories of Petelei. Among others many people Monika Fludernik, Franz K. Stanzel, István Dobos, Ildikó Györke's result were used to outline what a Petelei narration may be like. I presented what kind of insecurities

can surround the definition of Petelei's short story corpus.

I attempted to gather which writings, how and why they turned into the part of the Petelei's canon under the last one hundred and eight years after his death. I researched it in connection with which may be the most important components of the today's erudition of Petelei: to this I revealed the lay interpretative community to Petelei's work, the Internet community sides, the blogs and I looked through the author's currently accessible works, and the specific success and acceptance of them.

In the second part of my dissertation I was dealing with the analysis of the short stories which were published while he was alive. I went around, what the cycle means in the Petelei oeuvre and how his definition may be linked to the appearance of the short stories and the literary working method. I examined the title broadcast characteristics of the Petelei short stories: this chapter is closely connected to the previous main part of the paper, since the topic is linked to the questions of the canon establishment and the text analysis. I paid attention longer for that narrative question, how the syllabus of the correspondence and the letter appears in the short stories. I examined it in more chapters, how the atmosphere was created, and what kind of narration and structural strategies the short-story writer uses. The end of the paper deals with the psychology of the short stories and the manners of the characters' characterisation. I paid a special attention to the female characters of Petelei.

It is proven according to my hopes these cognition

experiments may give a foretaste of the writing art of Petelei but his short stories are ready in any moments, to any readers or a literary historian generation are ready to accept and interpret.

3. The main results of the thesis

1. Based on my searching in the Petelei reception two of his obscurities are taking shape: the author's, who is unknown to the contemporary's readers all the time and the author's, who lives in hiding. My dissertation proves their two, falsity though it looks out at the contact of Petelei and the Transylvanianism at the same time, and in terms of local and global validity that can be interpreted his literary oeuvre in many ways.

2. From the life of Petelei even a short or brief summary was not born, in which there would not be imprecisions. I am processing in my work the articles which the encyclopedia articles and the Internet biographies about his work. Two figures are accentuated and they are easily available and the most inaccurate who is László Urbán and also Géza Hegedüs wrote his biographical criticism, which contributes to the spread of the biographical topos today.

3. István Petelei's short novel, which was published in 2008, became the basis text of the Hungarian language and literature and this caused a problem in the Internet press. The dissertation analyses the debate with not just the claim of the completeness and the traditional, classic publicity, but it is approaching the typical of new media mezzo- and micro-publicity, and presents the surprising fact:

the author with one or two writings has presented since 1979 without any interruptions in the high-school curriculum. I try it shortly to justify, that in the truth of the debate cited of Petelei didn't turn into exam question, but arose rather in connection with the new type of matura exam.

4. The fifth is the most essential chapter of the first part of my dissertation. Leaning on the volumes announcing the works of Petelei, I have prepared a hundred pages of indicator, a table and a data line to it. I compiled Petelei's full bibliography from his books from the author's story books given out in his life through the short stories selecting compiled posthumously until the anthology volumes implying the few writings to the ebooks. I was processing the full content of the above appeared volumes of the short story title, the posthumous one ensued with attention onto changes of address, the formation of the cycles and their disintegration, concerned the rate they got in journals' writings. Analysing data line it appeared that through the question's of the genre theory, how significant in Petelei's short story canon the editors' decisions.

5. In my dissertation I try to record the Petelei canon which is alive nowadays. In a chart I summarise and in the main text I analyse how and in what way became part of his works 44 from his 87 stories and 83 from all of 224. I raise awareness that it is a new and interesting perspective in the changes and forming in the posthumous canon comparing to the writer's creation of the canons. That is why I go into details why and how Petelei could make a difference in those text which were appeared in the press and in volumes.

6. Leaning on the data of the critical edition, I prepared Petelei's short stories that happened to be appeared in his life in all the press and the tables of his volume based on more viewpoints. Through these a lot of can be answered for instance: in a year how many short stories he published, how many times his novels were edited, which ones were the favoured ones what are the connections between his ordering and the press', and how his work routine changed at the end of his life. With the use of these data lines in the paper can be justified and precised some single facts. One of them is we can't name him a productive writer there is no silence in his active years and apart from his difficulties in his private life and health he was publishing continuously. Mostly of his brand new writing was edited in 1903 and however he was getting towards to his late years he created more and more new short stories so that was totally the opposite of the belief about him. All of these can help to present a new flash of his authorship.

7. In the dissertation a strange separation is forming in which two important events inconnection with Petelei can be seen: one is the researches about him, the other is his volumes and the readers reaction. In my opinion the previous myth about him can't disappear till it won't change on an academic level or the topos which were used in defining his place. The first part of my dissertation would like to give a help to it.

8. His volume editing in a contact – comparing his first and last volume (*Crosses, The Life*) – I try to prove, that some volumes of the author can be read as a narration cycle and those too which

contain an inner small cycle.

9. Petelei's selection of his short story titles distinguishes it from his contemporaries: the short titles with an exceptionally condensed semantic content with a plain construction are typical of his oeuvre, namely he got it from his contemporaries' characteristics criticisms. I prove the above ones with the author's volumes analysis of the earlier title variants of short stories

10. His syllabus of the correspondence without an exception, the death, mourning, pain, irreparable loss, the concepts of irreversible events, lies and the communication of absurdity are joined. Petelei's short story, one of the last was written in a letter form, *The Last Letter*, exceed the frameworks of the genre and the topic also.

11. The Petelei narrations' descriptor, an introduction and finisher parts are showing special retoric and poetic regularities. The rarely analyzed *Rural People* short novels represent great examples for how the keyword system of Petelei had been forming and showing the symbols of the everyday topics, places and how the metaphores are replacing the traditional metonymity. The typical way of his editing can be represented through a microanalysis in the *Homesickness* short novel.

12. Personification examples can explain the heroes (and heroines) acceptances through the different eras. The symbol system is unique because we can find them in the suicide-stories.

13. The second part's analyses, in which we can approach the biography from three perspective of Petelei's novels in his life,

hopefully can prove that it is worth to deal with the closed text corpus.

4. Publications and conference lectures

Relevant publications

Petelei István novellái és a kánonképzés = GRADUS Elektronikus Folyóirat, Vol 4, No 2, Kecskemét-Szolnok, Neumann János Egyetem, 2017, 55-83.

Az ismeretlen Petelei – Egy magyar elbeszélő életrajzi legendái = GRADUS Elektronikus Folyóirat, Vol 4, No 1, Kecskemét-Szolnok, Pallasz Athéné Egyetem, 2017, 65-88.

Változatok egy témára: Megjegyzések Petelei István első és utolsó kötetéhez = GRADUS Elektronikus Folyóirat, Vol 3, No 1, Kecskemét, Kecskeméti Főiskola, 2016, 64-68.

Szobák, tárgyak, bútorok: Metaforikusság Petelei István elbeszéléseiben = GRADUS Elektronikus Folyóirat, Vol 2, No 1, Kecskemét, Kecskeméti Főiskola, 2015, 1-13.

A víz mint a halál motívuma Petelei István elbeszéléseiben = GRADUS Elektronikus Folyóirat, Vol 1, No 1, Kecskemét, Kecskeméti Főiskola, 2014, 56-66.

Címek és címadási jellegzetességek Petelei István novellisztikájában = AGTEDU 2012 – A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe

alkalmából rendezett tudományos konferencia kiadványa, Kecskemét, Kecskeméti Főiskola, 2013, 79-84.

"Érdemes-e jónak lenni...?": "Nőiség", álmom és tisztesség Madách Imre és Petelei István elbeszéléseiben = XIX. Madách Szimpózium, Bp., Madách Irodalmi Társaság, 2012, 197-207.

Komédia hideg időben: Petelei István Honvágy című novellájáról, Elektronikus Könyv és Nevelés, XIII. évfolyam, 2011/4.

Személynevek és sorsok Petelei István novellisztikájában = AGTEDU 2011 – A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett tudományos konferencia kiadványa, Kecskemét, Kecskeméti Főiskola, 2011, 87-93.

Levél és levelezés Petelei István novellisztikájában = AGTEDU 2010 – TEAM 2010 – A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett 11. tudományos konferencia kiadványa, Kecskemét, Kecskeméti Főiskola, 2010, II. kötet, 346-354.

Tér és túj Petelei István novellisztikájában = AGTEDU 2009 – Bács-Kiskun Megyei Tudományos Fórum, Kecskemét, Kecskeméti Főiskola, 2010, 175-181.

Nők kettős tükrében: Petelei István nőalakjai = AGTEDU 2008 – Bács-Kiskun Megyei Tudományos Fórum, Kecskemét, Kecskeméti

Főiskola, 2008, II. kötet, 75-80.

Accepted for publication

Gyermekábrázolás Petelei István bemutatkozó kötetében, a Keresztekben = *GRADUS Elektronikus Folyóirat*, Kecskemét-Szolnok, Neumann János Egyetem, 2019

Conference lectures

A gyermekábrázolás Petelei István novelláiban. Elhangzott a NJE PK Nyelvészeti és Irodalmi Kutatóműhelyének *Változó nyelv - változó irodalom* című konferenciája, Neumann János Egyetem, Kecskemét, 2018. május 9.

Petelei István novellái és a kánonképzés. Elhangzott az *AGTEDU 2017-en (A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett 18. tudományos konferencia)*, Neumann János Egyetem, Szolnok, 2017. november 16.

Az ismeretlen Petelei – Egy magyar író életrajzi legendái. Elhangzott az *AGTEDU 2016-on (A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett 17. tudományos konferencia)*, Pallasz Athéné Egyetem, Kecskemét, 2016. november 10.

A Keresztektől Az életig – Petelei István első és utolsó kötetéről.

Elhangzott az *AGTEDU 2015-ön (A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett 16. tudományos konferencia)*, Kecskeméti Főiskola, Kecskemét, 2015. november 12.

Szobák, tárgyak, bútorok: Metaforikusság Petelei István elbeszéléseiben. Elhangzott az *AGTEDU 2014-en (A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett 15. tudományos konferencia)*, Kecskeméti Főiskola, Kecskemét, 2014. november 11.

A víz mint a halál motívuma Petelei István elbeszéléseiben. Elhangzott az *AGTEDU 2013-on (A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett 14. tudományos konferencia)*, Kecskeméti Főiskola, Kecskemét, 2013. november 13.

Címek és címadási jellegzetességek Petelei István novellisztikájában. Elhangzott az *AGTEDU 2012-n (A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett 13. tudományos konferencia)*, Kecskeméti Főiskola, Kecskemét, 2012. november 13.

Személynevek és sorsok Petelei István novellisztikájában. Elhangzott az *AGTEDU 2011-en (A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett 12. tudományos konferencia)*, Kecskeméti Főiskola, Kecskemét, 2011. november 10.

„Érdemes-e jónak lenni...?” „Nőiség”, álom és tisztesség Madách Imre és Petelei István elbeszéléseiben. Elhangzott a *XIX. Madách*

Szimpózium tavaszi ülészakán, Kecskemét, 2011. április 15.

Levél és levelezés Petelei István novellisztikájában. Elhangzott az *AGTEDU 2010 – TEAM 2010*-en (*A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett 11. tudományos konferencia*), Kecskeméti Főiskola, Kecskemét, 2010. november 4.

Tér és táj Petelei István novellisztikájában. Elhangzott az *AGTEDU 2009*-en (*A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett Bács-Kiskun Megyei Tudományos Fórum*), Kecskeméti Főiskola, Kecskemét, 2009. november 5.

Nők kettős tükörben: Petelei István nőalakjai. Elhangzott az *AGTEDU 2008*-on (*A Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából rendezett Bács-Kiskun Megyei Tudományos Fórum*), Kecskeméti Főiskola, Kecskemét, 2008. november 6.

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