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**The structure and changes of “literary self-consciousness” in the  
1960s**

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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## **1. Research background and Problem Identification**

This dissertation examines the Hungarian literature of the 1960s. The focus of the study is on the discourse on literature in this period. The interpretation of Hungarian literature - which, according to Anglo-Saxon critique, includes the achievements of literary history, literary studies and criticism in the present study - shows the dialectical succession of three modes of reading in the second half of the 20th century. The externalist literary interpretation of the Marxist monopoly of previous decades has been followed by a belief in pure literature and an internalist way of reading, more recently, however, in according to the cultural turn interpretive performances that focus on the context of works, authors, trends or genres, ie literary works in the broadest sense, are gaining ground. Our study focuses on the period of the loss of position of the Marxist monopoly and the development of the internalist way of reading.

The theoretical and conceptual basis of our research is provided by Pierre Bourdieu's field concept and the interpretation of art autonomy developed by Niklas Luhmann. In the dissertation, the concept of literary autonomy is not interpreted as a counter-concept of heteronomy, but as an attitude that unfolds in the current interpretive discourse and is not only an internal feature of the literary historical unit, but also a quality defined by the interpreter's self-referential disposition. This is called in the dissertation the secondary meaning of

autonomy, which belongs to both the work and the interpretation, in other words: it is formed in the dialogue between the work and the interpreter. The concept of autonomy in this sense expresses whether a literary work of art can be considered an autonomous, self-explanatory, self-understandable phenomenon for a given interpretive activity. Bourdieu's notion of field serves precisely to call into question the autonomy still assumed in the concept of the epistle of Foucault, to lead him out of the interior of the discourse and to mark the point from which it can be interpreted, explained, scientifically discussed.

For Luhmann's interpretation of systems theory art, the primary meaning of autonomy is essential. However, the autonomy of the system does not mean an internalist reading, because as a social system, a work of art together with the discourse surrounding it can become the subject of research. The way social systems work is through communication. This is because Luhmann's primary notion of autonomy makes it possible to simultaneously open the social-interpretive context of a literary work and assume the dialogue between the work and its context as a system that knows and claims something about itself. When we use the concept of literary self-awareness in the title of the dissertation, we refer to this. The subject of our study is how literature views itself as a system. How its self-reflective notions change.

Examining the discourse of literature on itself in the era, its volume is particularly striking. The basic theoretical genre of the decade is the debate. A significant part of the debates concern the

critique itself. The fact that the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Party prepared two documents in this regard in the first half of the Kádár era also shows the special importance of literary criticism and criticism of literary criticism: in 1961, *About some of the disabilities of our Literary Criticism* and in 1972 *The Account of the Cultural Policy Working Community of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist People's on some issues of our literary and artistic criticism*. The two documents roughly set out the scope of our study, which extends beyond the actual frontier of the decade. The demarcation of the period from 1961 to 1972 can also be well justified from literary policy considerations: from the end of '61, literary life was “consolidated”, this was when the system of György Aczél was built, and the latter remained in force until “hardening” in 1972.

## 2. The methodology followed

Our research is thematically located on the borderline between literature and sociology: in connection with the cultural-scientific turn of literary interpretation, it covers the context of literary works, more narrowly the nature of the interpretive discourse surrounding literary works. We do not undertake to create a historical grand discussion covering the whole period. Instead, we selected three distinctly different areas related to each aspect of literary comprehension.

What Max Weber affirmed in his study *Objectivity of Social Science and Social Policy* is true of our work. “There is no perfectly “objective” scientific analysis of cultural life, says Weber, which, explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously, makes these phenomena the object of research, analyses and divides them when presented.” In this sense, we also accept our one-sided views and lack of objectivity. For we are convinced that the historical past and social reality can only be accessed in such “ideal-typical constructions” that the understanding of the past is possible only through the creation of mental connections between problems.

All three examined discourses form a well-defined corpus of texts, which are subjected to intensive analysis and close reading. We examine the functioning of the literary system, in particular: the structure of literary self-consciousness, thus analysing direct or indirect statements about literature and not the individuals and groups

involved in communication about literature. This does not mean that we do not consider interpretations based on politics or personal stories to be valid, nor do we accept descriptions of the period under study based on dichotomies of oppression-liberation or collaboration-resistance. All we are saying - and this is the axiom of our study - is that in the period we studied, in the 1960s, the conditions of autonomy were available in the midst of which it was legitimate to interpret literature as a system. This is not a strong statement regarding the political and historical conditions of the era, as we have shown above, based on Luhmann.

We examine in the chosen discourses how the reception of literary works changed as the previously dominant Marxist aesthetics gradually ceased to be valid. By examining discourses, it is not our goal to write a regular history of interpretation in the 1960s. We disregard the analysis of the most important aesthetic-literary works of the age. Instead, we examine the “bottom view” of thinking about literature. This is not only a freely chosen methodological decision, but the subject matter: the '60s also require this perspective. The "heights" of literary theory and aesthetics have been subject to much stronger publishing regulations. On the other hand, large literary-aesthetic narratives did not become dominant during this period. The late monumental formulation of Lukács's aesthetics, which had previously almost completely determined the understanding of literature, also remained relatively unheard of, proving to be fruitless.

Examining literary critical discourse is much more promising for our approach. Literary criticism was given great importance in the

space of literary politics called hegemon, as tolerant works had to be “placed” by critical discourse, given appropriate criticism. This placement did not impose obligations on individual critiques, but on the whole of the critical discourse that unfolded about a particular work. It may therefore be instructive to review the discourses in terms of what “passive aesthetics” can be detected from them.

### 3. New results

To analyse the dispositional changes in critical discourse, we summarize the reception of two novels. Endre Fejes's *Rust Cemetery* and György Konrád's *The Visitor* is a justified choice because both were followed by a particularly big debate. The most important ideological-aesthetic elements of the critical discourse unfolding from the Fejes novel are referentiality, eschatological approach and ideological phraseology. As natural representatives of the socialist public, the reviewers examine the realities of the depicted novel world and seek the authorial purpose behind them. Since the reality depicted is negative, there must obviously be a silenced authorial goal: and that is to urge change. This ideological-aesthetic disposition is strained by the fact that the silencing of authorial intent and the associated ironic-concise narrative are not negative for the analysis, although the effect of style does not receive a separate aesthetic interpretation. So the critiques we have read so far work on two levels: they correct Fejes's novel in the right way, but they are also enthusiastic about it, based on different principles and different ways of reading. Based on this, we can establish a double critical attitude: the authentic interpretive work and the self-contained aesthetic-ideological value judgment, which do not fit organically, are sharply separated.

Based on the visitor's critical reception, we can say that the latent aesthetics of criticism changed a lot during the '60s. The literary



work was relatively out of the frame of reference of politics. This is not to say that there has been no political control over literature throughout the decade, the opposite has been revealed in detail in the literary-historical discourse of the era. However, an analysis of the critical discourse of the two selected novels suggests that the novel, which has already been published, is less and less placed in a mobilized interpretive framework.

The difference between the two discourses illuminates that the interpretive community around *The Visitor* is stronger. The relationship with Western influences has also changed. In the case of *The Visitor*, the fact that the novel follows foreign novel poetic trends did not in itself lead to condemnation. In the same way, it can be mentioned that the search for authorial intent becomes invalid. This suggestion - what did Fejes want with the *Hábetler's*? - was one of the strongest topos in the *Rust Cemetery* discourse. At *Konrád*, we find no trace of this consideration, although the figures presented may indeed evoke a critical attitude towards society.

It is also important to note that *The Visitor's* discourse lacks philosophical questions. István Hermann's study of negative values based on the category of totality actually approached and criticized Fejes's work on the basis of theoretical and aesthetic aspects. In the analyses of the visitor, on the other hand, philosophical insights - for example, Ferenc Fehér's explanations of Marxist legal theory - are subordinated to the novel, gaining a place in the aesthetic aspect of the work experience. They do not carry the construction function that determines the interpretation of art. We can thus record that during the

decade, the Marxist figures that determined the interpretation of art were pushed into the background. Criticisms from a position of power came to the forefront of discourse, critical discourses increasingly separated texts from aspects of social reality, and readings examining the author's intent and the social impact of the message conveyed by the work gradually lost their validity.

The second chapter relates to the Resolution of 1972. The Resolution was born after long preparations. The Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist People's Party asked all the major forums of literary life (journals, universities, academies) to express its views on the situation of criticism in the form of internal working material. The Hungarian National Archives holds a large collection of the received materials. This corpus provides insight into non-public discourses on criticism. The Resolution was drafted by September 1972, the documents examined come from the period of one and a half years preceding it, that is, from the very end of the period we are examining.

In analysing the discourse, we have identified the following leitmotifs. An indication of theoretical shortcomings is the awareness that the theoretical basis of literary criticism has become problematic. The perception of problems related to theory was one of the leading motifs of the literary and metacritical debates of the period, and was also decisive in the two examined critical discourses. By the end of the decade, Marxist social theory was pushed back from text analysis. Even in The Visitor's critiques, we have seen - even in the work of

Ferenc Fehér - that theory is increasingly inorganically related to textual interpretation.

Recording the opposition of “peoples” and “urbanites” is the second leitmotif. For us, the question is more to what extent this confrontation had theoretical consequences. The summary of the Writers' Union mentions the issue of opposition in the subject of the theoretical validity of criticism. We see, however, that it is not about theoretical opposition, but rather defining “cosmopolitanism” along text-reading preferences — this name alone does not outline a coherent theoretical approach, but value-choice reflexes. György Lukács himself will be criticized for his debatable literary preferences.

A recurring motive in every round, in every way of speaking, for professionals involved in the preparation of the Resolution, is the issue of mass culture.

The subject of the third chapter is the emergence of structuralism in Hungary. In this monumental corpus of texts, we have placed at the center of our study the articles that evaluated structuralism and raised the question of the integrability of structuralism and Marxism. We examined how structuralism and its Marxist “integration” transformed the self-consciousness of the literary system, that is, the interpretation of art and the thinking about literature.

The emergence of structuralism in Hungary culminated the process of non-ideology. The analyses of works inspired by structuralism turned their attention to the internal relations and quantifiable aspects of the text. The quest for the Marxist integration

of structuralism, in turn, sought to enrich the methodological diversity of analysis with structuralism, increasingly confining the insights of Marxist aesthetics to the status of mere ornamentation. And the fact that the Resolution made a decision in principle on the non-integration of structuralism has further facilitated the rise of textual readings, as it has diverted attention from the conflicting theoretical frameworks.

Overall, therefore, we see that ideological-based understanding prior to 1956 declined, and the ideological constellations that determined the interpretation of the literature collapsed. In this context, the communal nature of literature became uninteresting from the point of view of criticism, the interpretation of the works no longer sought the “purpose”, “message”, and “message” of the work. Criticism has been increasingly decontextualizing the work as early as the 1960s, with an interest in how it was created. Literature is detached from politics, but so it must also be detached from “reality” and community.