

University of Szeged
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ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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CONFLICTS OF IDENTITY IN THE GEO-CULTURAL SPACE

(THE INTERMEDIATE STATIONS OF NOWHERE AND ELSEWHERE

IN THE ART OF

ERZSÉBET JUHÁSZ, LÁSZLÓ VÉGEL AND OTTÓ TOLNAI)

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I. SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

1. The aim and problem identification of the dissertation

The Hungarian literature of Yugoslavia, and later, Vojvodina has incorporated (and still does) the heterogeneity arising from the encounters of cultures, their reciprocated effects on each other, multilingualism, and religious diversity, and the experiences of constructions of identity that reacted in a flexible manner to the frequent changes of borders and bodies of state. Erzsébet Juhász, who was working in the Yugoslavia that was breaking apart and becoming the terrain for the beliefs of the quasi peaceful coexistence of different nationalities, for ideological battles, and later for ethnic cleansing, namely in the “Balkan pit”, in the bloody province, she writes in several of her essays, prose essays about the loss of the intellectual, creative spaciousness ideal. Regardless of her discomfort and anxiety the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina in the 1980-ies and 1990-ies testifies that it can create egress for itself despite the political-ideological situation, the historical and social necessity, the existential uncertainty, the areal definiteness, the destructive, closed mindedness of the province and the war cataclysm. It creates those border crossings, those paths of escape that lead to the (vast) world, and which organize the texts of the authors with fruitful intensity who are examined in this dissertation (Erzsébet Juhász, László Végel and Ottó Tolnai). All of whom are members of the generation of the *Új Symposion* journal which has pilloried “the misinterpreted regionalism” (Imre Bori) even after its ceasing. Thus these minority poetics mediating deeply personal and autobiographically rich instances of narratives manifesting from the ruins of a country fallen apart, constructing newer and newer *rhizome maps* (Gilles Deleuze) from cultural rubble, or by facing transgressive states pushed to the limits on the rim of Europe travelling through time and different borders, roaming *untrodden roads*, they reckon with the false fantasies of nostalgia and destroy, exclude, or hold up to ridicule the discourses of ideology, politics and power.

In my dissertation (primarily focusing rather on Erzsébet Juhász’s work) I venture to present how these culturally and generically hybrid texts, beside experience and presence of different transgressive states (war, death, loneliness, desire etc.), represent the homeland, Yugoslavia, namely the countryside, the province, or the (vast) world, and in it, the nationality, the minority entity, or the creative subject moving to inner emigration (existing in crisis and between provisionality). On the other hand I try to unravel the openness, spaciousness, experiences of strangeness and hominess, and the poetics in the art of Erzsébet Juhász, and in

relation to her, of László Végel and Ottó Tolnai that reveal the author roaming the intermediate stations of nowhere and elsewhere, the inner emigration of the nomad (Deleuze), her transcendent homelessness (E. Juhász), homeless provincialism (Végel), or dead-end existence, later filled-up hominess, cosmopolitanism (Tolnai), with the help of reflections on representations of provinciality and the confrontation with the cataclysm of war.

Why is Erzsébet Juhász in the focus of my inspection? The writer, literary scholar, and professor (unlike László Végel and Ottó Tolnai) is almost entirely unknown not only to readers in Hungary, but also to the literary profession in Hungary. For this reason I aim (even though not primarily) to prepare the grounds for interpretations (in this work), through which the author could be introduced to the contemporary Hungarian (narrow) literary discourse, and later to common knowledge. The current invisibility of Erzsébet Juhász in Hungary does not measure the quality of the oeuvre, rather it is related to the tragically premature death of the author. Notwithstanding the fact that Hungarian journals (*Jelenkor*, *Tiszatáj*) have published her writings and her volume entitled *Állomáskeresésben* was published by Jelenkor Kiadó, she also has maintained close relationships with significant Hungarian representatives of the vocation, eg. Mihály Ilia. From another respect the study of Erzsébet Juhász is suitable by the fact that her oeuvre is unique as she was the first Hungarian literary scholar in Vojvodina to study the literature of the Monarchy, the first to analyze the literature of the Monarchy applying it as model of crisis of existential and literary representation of the region, Central-, East Europe. Her scholarly work is in close relation to her literary work, the (often subversive) transgressions in the oeuvre of Erzsébet Juhász happen not only thematic and motivic, in genres, in the subject or between the personal and the strange, other points of view, but also inside the different discourses.

2. Principles of methodology

In connection with the correlation of “culture: interlacedness” Beáta Thomka in her own field of research connects the *Europe of regions* with Sándor Weöres’ rag carpet, as the rag carpet “in accordance with its structure complies with the essence of the mentioned idea of the continent: historical, linguistic, and cultural weave of variety, blending and interlacedness” (Thomka). In my dissertation I too have been examining the rich patterns, reoccurring figures, themes, structure of threads, modifications, restructure, and reorganization in the material left by the weight of years on this rag carpet, or rather a well definable section of it, the complex

of issues connected to experiences of province and conflicts of identity connected to strangeness and hominess in Erzsébet Juhász work, as well as certain threads associated and interlaced with them in the aesthetic worlds of László Végel and Ottó Tolnai. As a result of this examination, by the exploration of the deep structure of this piece of the rag carpet of the Hungarian literature of Vojvodina a configuration has been outlined that is a rhizomatic, unfinished research (Deleuze, Radomir Konstantinović), a form of a rag carpet that can be continuously weaved on, sewed further, for the visualization of its methodology the pattern was given by the patch-work novel of Dubravka Ugrešić *Štefica Cvek az élet sűrűjébe* (*Štefica Cvek in the thick of life*). During the tracking of the pattern, the unravelling, unseaming and further weaving of different threads, the formation of new intertwines, in the spirit of Deleuzian philosophy, I did not differentiate between academic and belletristic texts, meaning I did not apply the latter to illustrate the former.

Although literary theory in Hungary does not view the personal as an interpretative category (Anna Menyhért), there are serious methodological reasons and reasons deriving from literary history that my manner of discourse often draws on this ill-famed aesthetical category. On the one hand the material for my scientific investigation demands this sort of discourse, it treats it as a conspicuity, on the other hand in post-modern literary study (taken from impressionist critique of the early 20th century) there exist interpretations that imitate or evoke the style, manner of speech of the texts discussed, analyzed by them. Additionally, in Erzsébet Juhász's scientific, discursive language is also an essay-like, essayistic language just as the language of most of the Hungarian interpretative community (deriving) from Vojvodina. The theoretical, philosophical texts favored by myself are also not characterized by rigorous, systematic methodology, while Deleuze's book on Proust or his theory of rhizome developed with Guattari (and through the art of Tolnai as well) have shaped and directed my view and methodology.

As this minority weave, thanks to cultural hybridism, "belongs to different linguistic cultural structures simultaneously" (Zoltán Virág), in order to study it, it is a crucial task to take the "parallel phenomena" of southern Slavic literature into consideration. For this reason I have been striving to include those Serbian and Croatian texts in my field of vision which seemed in accordance with the point-of-view of the body of text studied in this dissertation, in their provincial aspects, war time years and different transgressive states, the domestic or moving environment of being-in-the-world, and the field of homelessness. Thus Konstantinović's work entitled *The philosophy of the province* forms an important theoretical

frame postulating the opposition (created by the province) between province and the (vast) world, not as a geographical distance of center and periphery, rather as a distance of thought and thinking. The historical point-of-view of the dissertation is highlighting the history void of sense (Danilo Kiš) in opposition to the Hegelian teleological history on the one hand, but the denial and forgery of history of the closed minded province (Konstantinović) is also explained. Against narratives of history written by the ones in power, I have touched upon Adorno's critique of Walter Benjamin, namely that small nations, minorities, the losers also must write their own history. Out of the representatives of post-modern narrative philosophies, I followed the position of Hayden White which framed the interpretation of essays and diaries of László Végel.

The de-contextualization of the minority entity leads most likely to autocracy, vulnerability caused by threatening power which can lead to the ceasing of existence. "His past is without history, he is thrown into the state of no language, the traces of existence formed during his life become unutterable to him" (Alpár Losoncz), for this reason in my paper I could not set aside the aspect of minority in the body of texts examined. The basis for this was given by Deleuze's and Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, which can be especially adequate the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina, especially in the case of art by Erzsébet Juhász, László Végel or Ottó Tolnai, as the language of these writers is by its nature a language that is a "deterritorialized language, which is fitting for strange, minority usage" (Deleuze – Guattari), in other words for the artistic voice of those living on the peripheral provinces, pushed to the marginal, the overthrown, those losing their language.

In order to present (to a larger audience) the works of Erzsébet Juhász in Hungary, I have set out to highlight the parallels in literature of the southern Slavic and Hungarian literature of Vojvodina from feasible aspects of the geo-cultural and intercultural context of the texts. I have also intended to highlight the points of connection to Hungarian (and world) literature and to montage parallel points-of-view with the texts of Erzsébet Juhász aiding readers to place and relate to the language, poetics and artistic behavior of the writer, scientist, and professor born in Bačka Topola, as they lack the ability to fully grasp, or due to cultural codes, even understand the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina and southern Slavic literature. However, the primary aim of mine was not to increase visibility of Erzsébet Juhász, as this is not a monography about her, thus I did not investigate her works in their entirety, I have included only those texts which were fitting from the points-of-view of representation of provinciality, political- historical dimension, the states of transgression, interpretations of

crises, the perception of minority existence, and their linguistic-poetic representations. For the same reason I have only moved and interpreted the pieces of works of Ottó Tolnai and László Végel that were important to the idea of this dissertation.

3. The structure and results of the dissertation

The directions of the study, the unseaming of the piece of rag carpet, then resewing it during the personal reading is completed in seven chapters focusing in problems and analysis of texts. Particular issues reappear, recur in the chapters, but in the context of different circles of ideas they appear in different light and their explanation and meaning is modified.

The subject of the I. chapter consists of not only the experience of minority and representational literary strategies, but also the relationship to the minority cultural traditions, to the beginnings of the Yugoslavian Hungarian literature and to the province, the smothering dust of the province and to provinciality. Erzsébet Juhász's novel entitled *Műkedvelők* written in connection with Szenteleky, her "strange investigation" I interpreted as the key novel of identity seeking of the Vojvodina Hungarians (I. 1. subchapter), later with the help of the concept of border(idea) and Konstantinović's concept of province, applying my own terms of dust-control and dust extraction I analyze the problems of death and province as well as the individual (I. 2. subchapter).

In chapter II. I analyze Erzsébet Juhász's *Senki sehol soha* volume of prose – a connected to aspects of provinciality – from a horizon of philosophy of desire (following Sartre and Lévinas) thus provisionality becomes the central category of the book. Juhász's proses of longing oscillate between the private and the strange, the wordly and the transcendent, the being-nowhere and the being-elsewhere. Essential parts of this chapter consist of the exploration of the (provincial, minority) experience of enclosedness on the one hand which is fulfilled with the help of the spatial and poetical form of the impasse. On the other hand the metaphor of the tat-shop opens up the road to the statement that the categories never, nowhere and nothing are the *par excellence* requisites of the peripheral existence. I also investigate the book's concept of passing and historical dimension (the denial of history of the province) in this chapter.

Chapter III. focuses on Erzsébet Juhász's essays, prose essay and (essay)studies. The volumes of essays (especially *Esti följegyzések*) I interpret based on Foucault's concept of

hüpomnémata writing, through which the subject of Erzsébet Juhász is drawn: the “scattered fragments of logos allow the construction of selfness” (Foucault). These essays are attempts on the part of the dissipated subject facing states of transgression to create one’s own calmness, oneself as the certainty and relating to this a kind of residency, “the retreat, the way toward the self, the retreat to the self as to a shelter” (Lévinas) (III. 1. subchapter). In the second subchapter (III. 2.) I examine the quest for stations and the techniques of irradiance and swarming of Erzsébet Juhász in connection with the province, the experience of enclosedness caused by the transgressive state of war, as well as some poetics and points-of-view that served as a model for the author. Furthermore, I interpret Juhász’s essays with the help of the term “born and bred stranger” and Merleau-Ponty’s “»transcendental strangeness« that is inside every private”.

In chapter IV entitled *Peripheral existence and war cataclysms: writing as a field of homelessness* summarizes the aesthetic answers given to the states of existence of the Balkan war. In the experience of being a “double marginality” as a “mass that can be eliminated” (Juhász) and the reckoning with the “false dream” of a motherland (Végel) together lead to the definition of history (and the region of imaginary, Central-East Europe, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the great Yugoslavia) as the „chronicles of torn up roots”. In this chapter I analyze those aspects of Zoltán Danyi’s novel *A dögeltakarító* in length that are connected to the circle of thought of Europe and the Balkans, wars, nationalism, ethnical cleansing, and guilt, as well as collective responsibility. In this context Slavenka Drakulić’s document novel *They couldn’t hurt a fly* is also part of my investigation.

In chapter V. I bring in those (essay)texts of Erzsébet Juhász primarily that serve as “crisis narratives” (Alpár Losoncz) that develop reality. From their horizon it becomes possible to interpret literature as a tool/product for building (national) identity as well as the representation of the minority Hungarian in the Hungarian literature of Vojvodina (in Erzsébet Juhász’s work). The representation that sprung out of the need to create the (missing) culture, rather than the endangeredness of the consciousness of nationality. The base for outlining the modification of minority identity structures and experiences of crisis of descriptions of the memories and travels on untrodden roads by Erzsébet Juhász were the interpretations of Foucault’s heterotrophies, permeability between strangeness/domestic (private) and the concepts of wandering and migrations of Ian Chambers.

In chapter VI entitled *László Végel and the “homeless local patriotism”* I focus primarily on the author’s diary entries, diary volumes and volumes of essays during the 1990’s Balkan wars and the NATO bombing, through which I attempt to develop the experience of cosmopolite local patriotism of Végel that is similar to Erzsébet Juhász’s feelings of strangeness, the state of mind of longing, and inner emigrations from her “imperative of always staying” (Zoltán Virág). Language erosion, linguistic endangeredness, and the future image, prediction, and uncertainty of loss of the language in Végel’s poetics, from the radical language use in his (diary)novel *Egy makró emlékiratai*, from the stuttering (Deleuzeian) language to reaching the cultural speech of Végel is mediated in a subversive manner. This quasi-not-well-owned-language of the minority writer – in connection with the late Wittgensteinian language philosophy – leads to homelessness in Végel’s art. The historical, political dimension, furthermore the social definiteness, the marginality, the existential state of minority, the notion of “European bastard” all become interesting for interpretation from the points-of-view how they construct the loss of Europe and eventually the world together as the space of homelessness.

In chapter VII. entitled: *The worldliness and provinciality of the scenes in Ottó Tolnai’s poetics and prose* I investigate a small fraction of the author’s monumental, encyclopedic aesthetic universe, which lets us see the unique view, way of thinking, and poetic practice that creates its own worldly scenes (VII. 1. subchapter) from the “geography of its context (namely through inclusion of the matter of the province, homeland, trash, the past, history, cultural fragments, ex-Yugoslavian nostalgia etc.). The dynamic Tolnai universe that is pulsating in the scattering of meaning, imbalance of meaning and continuous modifications, that creates the being-in-the-world as an experience of feeling at home opposed to Erzsébet Juhász’s experience of strangeness or the homeless local patriotism of László Végel (VII. 2. subchapter).

In summary: The inspection of text-textiles cut from the oeuvre of Erzsébet Juhász, László Végel and Ottó Tolnai, the unravelling of the weave/seam and the remainders, the perception of the presence of the texts left out of the analysis and so beside taking into consideration further possible paths of study, in my dissertation I have drawn up the loops of meaning of the (literary representations) of the existential experiences of hominess and homelessness.

II. PUBLICATIONS IN CONNECTION WITH THE DISSERTATION

Volume Chapter

1. Women's Migrant Models and Patterns = *Vojvodinaian – Hungarian – Women*, Ed. by Karolina Lendák-Kabók, Novi Sad, Forum Publisher, 2019 (before be published)
2. Pseudo-Tolnai: I, the Desiring Animal = Perpendicular relationships: *Studies from El Kazovskij*, ed. by Katalin Cserjés, Dóra Szauter, Szeged, JATEPress, 2015, pp. 11–14.

Journal publications

1. The stations of nobody-, nowhere-, never-being rural/secural (Erzsébet Juhász), *Tanulmányok*, University of Novi Sad, Department of Hungarian Literature, Novi Sad, 2018 (before be published)
2. The howler Tolnai-watermark has been written to the zero, *Műút* LXI/4, 2016058, pp. 79–82.
3. Erzsébet Juhász in the hupomnemata-writing, *Híd*, 2016, 9., pp. 81-87.
4. Don't be afraid of the rhizome!, *Jelenkor*, LX. grade number 5, pp. 635–637.
5. The War is the war is the war is the war (Zoltán Danyi: *A dögeltakarító*), *Műút*, No. 2016056, pp. 106–019.
6. The Tolnai's own, *Ex Symposion*, 2013, No 83, pp. 48–50.
7. The encounter of death and the province in two dilettantes – Erzsébet Juhász cleaning the dust of Kornél Szenteleky, *Forrás*, February, 2013, pp. 105–112.
8. The desert, the beautiful, brutal shadow of Nothing – A sketch of a leaving over of “being eaten, lace creeping”, *Parnasszus*, winter 2012, pp. 27–30.

III. CONFERENCE LECTURES IN CONNECTION WITH THE DISSERTATION

1. The philosophical risks of Erzsébet Juhász's essay(proze) (18–19th May 2018, V. Collosion points, Conference of the Philosophical Sciences Department of the National Association of PhD Students, Szeged, Department of Philosophy, University of Szeged)
2. The actuality of Erzsébet Juhász's art (17th April 2017, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Erzsébet Juhász's birthday, Serbia, Topolya, Erzsébet Juhász Library)
3. Being closed to the province? Ottó Tolnai's rurality and securality (4th March 2017, PhD Conference 2017, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Szeged, University of Szeged)
4. Pseudo-Tolnai: I, the desiring animal (26th November 2015, El Kazovsky's symposium, Szeged, Grand Café)
5. Erzsébet Juhász in the hupomnemata-writing (21st May 2015, X. Grezsa Ferenc Memorial Competition, Szeged, SZAB Székház)
6. Stitching, sewing, cucumberscouring, women's writing – Following Ildikó Lovas and Dubravka Ugrešić (6th November 2014, Women in Science Conference, Szeged, Szent-Györgyi Albert Agóra)
7. The offer of the migrant's life experience (16th June 2014, Festive Book Fair, Ferenc Móra Memorial Conference, Szeged, Hall of the City Hall)
8. The draining history of Attila Balázs's "fact-tale chronicle" (8th May 2014, IX. Grezsa Ferenc Memorial Competition, Szeged, University of Szeged)
9. The draining history of Attila Balázs (25–26th April 2014, Identity, memory, history, Conference of the Department of Literary Studies of the National Association of PhD Students, Budapest, ELTE)
10. It enters into the material and the flesh of the world – the metaphysics and eroticism in Ottó Tolnai's *The sea shell* (1st March 2014, conference of the Hungarian PhD students organized by the Balassi Institute and the Márton Áron College, Szeged, University of Szeged)
11. Nobody, nowhere, never? (9th May 2013, After Travel – In the honor of László Dormán and Erzsébet Juhász, Serbia, Topolya, Erzsébet Juhász Library)
12. The encounter of death and the province in two dilettantes – Erzsébet Juhász cleaning the dust of Kornél Szenteleky (16–18th November 2012, XI. Hungarian Student Science Conference in Vojvodina, Serbia, Subotica, University of Novi Sad Hungarian Language Teacher Training Faculty)
13. Contemporary (Vojvodinian) Hungarian literature (25th October 2011, jointly organized by József Attila Kör and Hungarian Institute of Sofia, Bulgaria, Sofia, St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University)