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PHD THESIS

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*A Forgotten Press Organ: The Role of the Newspaper Bácsmegyei
Napló in the Evolution of the Hungarian Literature in Vojvodina*

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1. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND AIMS OF THE THESIS

The subject of my doctoral thesis is the newspaper *Bácsmegyei Napló* and its role in the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina. The newspaper was published between 1903 and 1941 in Subotica. It played a truly important role from 1920 until it was discontinued in 1941, when it was considered the most important daily newspaper of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina.

The beginnings of the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina can be traced back to the newspapers that took upon themselves the task of providing literature for the readers, to give voice to the writers living there and to announce literary competitions to find talent. The *Bácsmegyei Napló* has not been the subject of any research, even though its literary supplement, first published in 1928, gave space to a generation of writers who, with few exceptions, did not survive the Second World War, and their work is recorded only in this press organ. In addition to literary works, the newspaper sought to find talented young people through competitions. Upon selecting the novels to be published in sequels, it was a priority to introduce authors from Vojvodina.

The editorial staff of the *Bácsmegyei Napló* also published anthologies and volumes, which was a of great importance to the Hungarian culture in Vojvodina in the period between the two world wars.

The owner and the editor of the newspaper was Ferenc Fenyves; however, his work was overshadowed by his classmate Dezső Kosztolányi. The study of the newspaper is a good opportunity to focus on his activities as a high school student, a budding journalist and an editor.

The dissertation is accompanied by a bibliography of nine thousand items. This is a list of works published in the literary supplement of the *Bácsmegyei Napló*, which contains the works of authors from Vojvodina, still unknown until now, including novels of interest, as well as a list of reprints of the works of Hungarian authors, which can also be important sources of our literary history.

My thesis aims to examine the literary activity of a forgotten press organ, revealing hitherto unknown data on literary history.

2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The nine chapters of the dissertation give an insight into the early period of the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina and the literary activities related to the editorial office of the *Bácsmegyei Napló*.

After the introduction, I will discuss the history of the press in Subotica, its relations and evolution, as I consider it important to present the context in which the newspaper originated. What were the processes that led to the city's need for a daily newspaper? What were the obstacles that prevented its publication after the change of empire? What was the secret of the fact that, while the competitors disappeared one by one, the *Bácsmegyei Napló* managed to survive. It is also necessary to highlight the modernity of the paper and its diversified editorial policy, because these qualities allowed its continuity and its ability to flourish in the most difficult historical times.

Ferenc Fenyves, the legendary editor of the paper, died in 1935, and the paper was washed away by the Second World War. Thanks to new research in recent years, such as the discovery of the minutes of the self-development group of the high school in Subotica, Fenyves also came into focus along with Dezső Kosztolányi. In addition to his work in the self-development group, he wrote poetry as a student. This is also the result of recent research.

In 1928, the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina reached a milestone: journals were founded, literary columns were published, and almanacs presented the literary works of Vojvodina. Ten years after the World War and the change of empire, the citizenship status of Hungarians living in the Kingdom of Serbo-Croatian-Slovenia was resolved. The *Vajdasági Írás* was published this year as a supplement of the *Képes Vasárnap* edited by Kornél Szenteleky. An anthology of Hungarian poets was published under the title *Kéve*, as well as the works of South Slavic poets under the title *Bazsalikom*. The anthology *Vagyunk!*, the Christmas supplement of the *Bácsmegyei Napló* was also published this year, comprising the works of Hungarian authors from Vojvodina. In the same year, the Helikon meeting took place in Óbecse, where the writers and editors envisaged the publication of a literary magazine, which was thwarted by the imposition of the royal dictatorship.

The fifth chapter of the dissertation focuses on the literary supplement of the *Bácsmegyei Napló*, whose new era began on 1 January 1928. It was published with separate, consecutively numbered pages, with the aim of providing readers with a collection of literary

texts in a single volume by the end of the year. Although the editors of the supplement changed over the years, the successors of Ferenc Fenyves retained the structure of the newspaper, with literature in the second half of the Sunday issue. In the 1920s, the *Bácsmegyei Napló* served as a forum for the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina, but over time the demand for a literary journal outgrew its potential and at the same time the literary significance of the paper faded.

New columns were constantly added to the literary supplement, depending on which writers had published their works in the newspaper. The literary columns illustrate the literary policy of the newspaper and, through it, the changes in the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina.

The *Bácsmegyei Napló* started publishing novels in sequels in 1928, and its editors focused on the publication of works of Hungarian and foreign authors. They considered it important to present Hungarian novels from Vojvodina, few of which had seen the light of day elsewhere. The new discoveries include novels that have not yet been seen by researchers and thus have not become part of the literary opus. In my research, I found eight novels published in sequels, which have not yet been known to literary history: *Aranygyapjú (Golden Wool)* by Arányi Jenő; *P. G* by Darvas Gábor; *Varázstükör (Magic Mirror)* by Diószeghy Tibor; *Oktalan szerelem (Love Without Reason)* by Gergely Boriska; *Fekete Csillag: Regényes elbeszélés a serdültebb ifjúság számára (Black Star: A story for the Adolescent Youth)* by Karlócai/Létmányi József; *Báró a katedrán (Baron in Professorship)* by Novoszel Andor; *Erős Mátyás mestersége (Erős Mátyás' Craft)* and *Moszkvától Párizsig és vissza: Filmregény (From Moscow to Paris and Back: A Film Novel)* by Tamás István.

An examination of the novels published in the press organ reveals that most of them are dime novels, but there are also some report and historical novels. There is, however, a fading trend, since at the beginning of the supplement it was important to find original Vojvodina novels, but by the end of the 1930s reprints of works already published as volumes predominate.

The seventh chapter of the dissertation is concerned with the literary competitions of the *Bácsmegyei Napló*, their importance, success or failure. In 1927 and 1928-29 a novel competition, in 1930 and 1931 a short story competition and in 1931-32 a poetry competition were announced. Only a few talented authors, such as Mihály Majtényi or Andor Novoszel, were selected. However, the competitions were not always successful, as the quality and language of the texts did not meet the desired standards.

In addition to the Sunday issues of the *Bácsmegyei Napló*, the Easter and Christmas issues also offered readings. They can be looked upon as anthologies of the Hungarian

literature in Vojvodina. In addition to the permanent columns, the Christmas supplements also included biographies of writers, containing hitherto unknown information. In analysing the issues of the newspaper, I examined two different themes: the Christmas issue of 25 December 1934, and the issues of the period after the death of the owner and editor-in-chief, Ferenc Fenyves.

The writers in the holyday issue boldly used the symbols of the sublime, but their works are nevertheless sad and pessimistic. The reasons lie in the political and economic situation of the period. In the issues under review, special attention was paid to the motifs of war and search, which are not closely linked to the holiday, but they appear in several columns. Among the texts, the Christmas writings, especially the poems, stand out for their aesthetic value.

After the death of Ferenc Fenyves on 18 October 1935 obituaries, memoirs, telegrams to the family, and writings by colleagues and peers continued to appear until his funeral. After his death, the productive period of the *Bácsmegyei Napló* came to an end. The editors, among them Ferenc Fenyves' brother, Lajos Fenyves, could only continue on the path they had begun, but they had no more strength left to add new things.

The Fenyves family bought the printing house of Aladár Hirth during the First World War, which was called Minerva since 1919. They published almanacs, poetry books and novels, many of which had already appeared in the newspaper, as well as specialized non-fiction and official forms. Minerva's publishing activities did much for the minority Hungarian culture, and although its owners also considered the business aspect important, most of the works published were irreplaceable, and they have not been researched thus far.

A valuable part of the dissertation is the chapter on the unknown data and works of the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina. There were cases when I only specified a date of death, as in the case of Andor Novoszel, but there were also cases when I managed to find the date of birth and death of the author, as in the case of János Govorkovich or Lucia. The unknown Hungarian novels from Vojvodina are also data that have been missing from our literary history. The family of György Petri's father, who was born in Subotica, was also represented in the *Bácsmegyei Napló*, and the data about them may also enrich Hungarian literary history with new findings.

The dissertation also comprises an appendix including a catalogue of writers, journalists and public figures from Vojvodina, their autobiographical notes, an index of novels in sequels published in the *Bácsmegyei Napló* along with a bibliography of nine thousand items.

3. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The subject of my research is a hitherto unknown and underrated literary supplement, which played a prominent role in the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina in its time. This is because the newspaper was published in Subotica. The issues in the period between 1928 and 1941 under investigation have not been uploaded to any online platforms yet.

The *Bácsmegyei Napló* embraced the minority Hungarian literature of our region in its own peculiar way: the literary supplement of the Sunday issues featured a variety of readings, the weekday issues included novels in sequels. The newspaper also motivated authors by announcing competitions and provided readers with publications.

The majority of the authors in the newspaper did not survive the Second World War due to their age, political affiliation or origin. Many of them are not even included in the *Hungarian Literary Encyclopaedia of Vojvodina* by Gerold László. Their opus exists only in this newspaper, as well as the novels published in sequels, which are still not part of our literary canon.

As a result of the research, several previously unknown facts about literary history have been uncovered, such as biographical data, novels or information that was erroneously known earlier.

The greatest achievement of the thesis is the investigation of a hitherto unknown press organ, which proved that the beginnings of Hungarian literature in Vojvodina are not to be related only to *Kalangya*, but there were other publication forums, other editors and different priorities.

The data of the bibliography in the appendix to this dissertation is an indispensable starting point for research into the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina.

4. PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE THESIS

Volume:

1. Muscular literary bond: the minutes of the self-development group of Dezső Kosztolányi and Géza Csáth, ed. Dóra Hicsik, Budapest, Dotnet, 2021.
2. Svakodnevni život Jevreja u Subotici = Everyday life of Jews in Subotica, ed. VUKOVIĆ DULIĆ Ljubica, Dóra Hicsik, Subotica, Subotica City Museum, 2021.

Paper published in a volume:

1. What is good for the city: From the literary heritage of the Jews in Subotica, (Éva HÓZSA, Dóra HICSIK), From Life to Life through the Holocaust, Novi Sad, Forum, 2015. 114-142.

Journal:

1. Contributions to the history of Hungarian literature: Andor Novoszel's novel Baron in Professorship, *Museion* 20 (2022), 5-13.
2. György Faludy and mystification (József GÁL, Dóra HICSIK), *Híd* 86 (2022)/1, 99-104.
3. On the journalistic activities of the Csodadoktor, *Acta historiae litterarum hungaricarum* 37-38 (2022), 201-211.
4. Ferenc Fenyves's (Friedmann) years in the self-development group, *Museion* 19 (2021), 59-75.
5. Christmas motifs in the 25 December 1934 issue of the *Napló*, *Museion* 18 (2020), 23-38.
6. Dezső Kosztolányi "The Language of Shakespeare" (Lajos HORVÁTH, Dóra HICSIK), *Bridge* 84 (2020)/5, 86-96.
7. About György Petri's roots in Subotica, *Híd* 80 (2016)/1, 3-23.