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MEASURE, ANALYSE AND JUDGE
Individual and history in Ferenc Sánta's re-reading novels and drama

DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

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I. The short summary of the proposed research project

My dissertation's unfortunate actuality is subject to the death of Ferenc Sánta as of 6th June 2008. One of the most significant and most interesting representatives of the post-1945 Hungarian prose literature left us. Despite of the amount of his published work is small in numbers, their repute and popularity is substantial. From up to his entrant writings, he has always been concerned with the same timeless, „big” topics - the man's moral responsibility, the individual and the power, the relationship of the individual to society, and society itself. How is one meant to live and how could one live? These themes are the piths of several of his novels, his drama (*Éjszaka*) and the three of his historical-philosophical novels (*Az ötödik pecsét*, *Húsz óra* and *Az áruló*).

Ferenc Sánta confronts human personality with the harsh challenges of history, and is looking for an answer for the same question, or rather for a series of questions: what could mankind do against the „bad” that continually appears in history; how could they preserve their moral integrity, whether if are they able to organise the implementing of human values around the struggle processes occurring throughout history? The conceptual structure of his works is based on two, opposing clouts: one of them is a structure of positive values, representing humanist traditions, such as the values of freedom, happiness and social solidarity, while the other clout is a group of negative values emerging in the political sphere: violence, fanaticism, servitude. Sánta looks at human values as being relevant in all ages, and creates his characters and their manners based on how much were they able to acquire and preserve these norms.

In my discourse I re-interpret Ferenc Sánta's prose and drama with the help of analysing his novels and drama in detail. Including the stories in the

examination would have bursted the boundaries of the dissertation, therefore I did not intend to undertake this action. My theme-selection is first and foremost explained by that Sánta's pieces in the last years, decades – according to me – did not get enough attention from the literary public opinion, as apart from a few short, re-reading analyses, no expensive and board summarising studies have yet existed about the investigation of this prose- and drama art. My principal aim was showing that Ferenc Sánta's creations did not lost their actuality over time and to offer the possibility for using an approach-method of re-reading and re-interpreting. In this examination I only take a look at the Hungarian literature in Sánta's period, and rather try to locate and evaluate his works from a contemporary viewpoint.

Based on my aims, the dissertation is divided into six bigger parts. The five analysing chapters are forestalled by two shorter, cohesive fragments, in which I introduce my personal motivation, highlight the problematic elements of the reception of Sánta's oeuvre and sum up the most important propositions of his literary mindset and ethos. This is followed by the re-reading experiment of the three novels and the drama, in which, apart from applying the same basic starting points, I tried to enlighten the meanings of the different texts from various aspects. The settling of the dissertation - the sixth bigger part - is primarily about expanding the thoughts of summing up, moreover presenting and reconstructing the „Sánta-myth” and the finished, but never published pieces of his work.

II. Investigations, collection of materials, sources, methods

My consciously chosen method of re-reading and re-interpreting for me does not terminate solely on text. In my dissertation I try to read – even: re-

read – between the lines, abstracting from the Kádár-era, in respect of both the writings and the critics about them. Especially because of the above drawn-up reasons we need to make an attempt to re-read, as this is the only way of interpreting the writings, which were created mainly in the '60s, from the viewpoint of 2016. In my definition, re-reading differs from reading by taking notice of the conditions and ways of interpretations of the present, and at the same time allowing the act of „settling in”, therefore creating the possibility for the „merging” of the two different timelines.

Furthermore the absorption and the absorption-story are not separable, and also – in case of Sánta this is especially significant – in every case are determined by historical/ideological factors. This is why I find it important to represent and demonstrate the historical indications included in the novels, before starting to analyse the novels themselves.

From a political-philosophical aspect, the three Sánta novels can be treated as an elemental unit, which teaches one how to ponder, evaluate and judge: a revolution, a reform, social act or passive resistance would be the most favorable option? Are there any conceptions or persons who are to be followed regardless their historical moments? Is it possible to make decisions about social policies and to induct reforms for society, but without including society in the decision making? Questions, which we can individually answer after having read the books, we can build up a picture in our minds about the Kádár-era and - in my opinion - about our days as well. It is the timelessness that pulls out Sánta from his contemporary peers and makes his works still living and actual.

For processing the works, I chose four different methods. In the case of „Az ötödik pecsét” I present pre-picked, concrete theme groups following the plot-analysis, and try to revise the parabola-trait, which have been demonstrated in prior analyses as consensus. In the „Húsz óra” I am trying

to focus on social ruptures that according to me are the most efficient ways of presenting this piece. „Az áruló” builds up general history-philosophical model through forms of behaviors portrayed as timeless. In case of the drama, „Az Éjszaka”, I compare four different texts apropos of the 1968 theatrical adaption: beyond Sánta's original textbook, I go through the director- and the prompter copies, furthermore the later released edition.

In case of all the novels - before the analyses - through concrete quotes, I highlight some of the historical background information of the given era, investigating those emphasised theme groups which have a dominant role in the novels. In case of „Az ötödik pecsét” this is the Arrow Cross regime, in „Húsz óra” the alteration of agriculture after World War II and the 1956 revolution, and by the case of „Az áruló” the devoted-to-be universal messages and variations of Hussitism appear in detail.

When processing „Az ötödik pecsét” after exposing the plot and the optional possibilities, I pan out about the moralistic decision-making situations evolving through the novel, and then analyse the novel's title and motto. I also demonstrate the individual interpretation of the novel's parabola (the ambivalence of the parable stated in the novel and it's practical application in my opinion can be evaluated as the writer's position against the parabolical mindset), and then I go through the projected, concrete models of behavior. As a closure of „Az ötödik pecsét's” analyses I collect the examples of the criticism of fanaticism, and the questions of the problems of freedom and violence.

Apropos of the „Húsz óra”, at the first place I am trying to demonstrate the social ruptures. Along urban-rural lines, following specific examples of conflicts stemming from different life forms, I trace the internal contradictions of the hierarchised agriculturist-society, and the oppositions of the past's and present's representatives. I devote a separate subsection of

the problem of the „Húsz óra's” genre-classification, and I try to approach the writing from the genre of a sociological novel and look back at debate that evolved in the 1960s. As a finish of the novel analyses I provide a possible interpretation, through which the „Húsz óra” can be read as kind of specific allegory of the Kádár-era.

When processing „Az áruló” I find the presence of the essential human conflicts a key question around the historical-political fields. Apart from the evaluation of blind conviction and detachment, it is remarkably important to introduce and typify the four concrete characters and to interpret the to them related, well-describable literary intent. Which model of behaviour are we supposed to follow, which one does the novelistic writer pick and why? In addition to the above it is at least as interesting to adapt the Hussite wars' 'hidden' general view of history to the Kádár-era. Should we choose the passive resistance or the coercive power of action? Reform or revolution? All these are general historical-philosophical questions, which demand an answer. But are there absolute „general” answers standing „above history”?

The next bigger section is about the drama titled „Az Éjszaka”. My aim is the interpretation of the drama and to introduce its relationship with the novel, „Az áruló”, then I am looking for the reasons of the unequivocal failure of the theatrical adaption. I dedicate a separate subsection for the comparing analyses of the significantly distinct text-variations, which I achieve by the texts' genetic (or synoptic) processing. In contrast to the critical editions' traditional, theoretical methods, the genetic criticism bespeak the parity of the text-variations, therefore the four different texts merge into one, however, with typographical methods, the variations still can be investigated.

The most important motivating factor of the ending chapter (The Sánta-myth and the reality) is the Petőfi Museum of Literature's Audiovisual

Library and their audio recordings in connection with Ferenc Sánta. Listening to these provided me with loads of new information about the '70s already well-known author, and they outlined the non-published, but probably done works' contours. Alongside the above presented theme groups I am looking for such common points that could mean the essence of Sánta's oeuvre. An incomplete oeuvre, and probably this incompleteness made it alive for decades and eternally immortal forever.

III. A short summary of the results

Sánta came out with his first writing in 1954, and then published two volumes of short stories, three novels, the drama variation of one of them, some publicist writings, and also gave interviews, although all of them by the end of the 60s. Years have passed, but after publishing a book of selected short stories (*Isten a szekeren*) in 1970, no more of his works were published, even though that according to his statements he was working on more novels. Some parts of his works were published in the cultural enclosure of the „Népszava” in the first half of the 70s, but after a while this too did stop. He wrote a one-act drama, and according to Géza Vasy three novels were formed too. There is a big chance that at least one-one parts were published from two of these novels in the newspaper. One of them - and some of the statements were hinting on this too - was planning to introduce the contemporary intellectual's world, but based on solely two installments it is hard to come up with a judgment.

It is visible that all of the planned works' conceptual materials are elementally connected to Ferenc Sánta's oeuvre. The intellectual novel could have been a sort of continuation of the „Húsz óra”, the „Szürke kő” could have been the extension of „Az ötödik pecsét” and the „Medúza”-

parabola could have been the continuance of „Az áruló”. Just as in his published novels, similarly in these works, history-philosophy and ethics could have been interweaved. The drama could have been the more strong-minded exposition of that idea, which can be read from Sánta's works and statements about the write-role: the writer's aspiration of finding the truth regardless political parties and a kind of judicial conduct.

The decades that have passed since Sánta's wrote his renowned works, subserved the ones who cut themselves out of the silence of ambush with unfolding and unraveling their own lives' memorial arrays. Sánta chose to not to live with this possibility. According to Miklós Zelei, „it would have been the ceiling of the Kádár-era's censorship if they could have forced Sánta to write”.

His last polite literature work was published in 1986, the drama-version of „Az áruló”, the „Éjszaka” and in essence this one was finished already. I myself have been thinking for a long time that new books in the future will explain his silence. This is not how it happened, and not even the fractional pieces are ever becoming available, because of based on trustworthy conveyance, the writer overrode them.

Ferenc Sánta's (literature)political engagement would deserve a separate study, a longer development, from up to his role in the „Petőfi Kör”, to his remarks in the „Írószövetség” or his speech at the meeting at Lakitelek. It can be stated that Sánta was monitored all the way long by the power, his public-social-political stances found a significant echo.

It is a creation-psychological mystery that why have Ferenc Sánta become silent, and why he kept on being silent when after the regime change, the freedom of speech became possible again.

The question raised by several points of the dissertation - why did Ferenc Sánta become silent? - is relevant, when summing up my theses. I

cannot come up with a definite answer, but it is very likely that the compulsion from the burden of self-repetition, the fear from the new writing's receptivity, and the Hungarian society's (altering from socialism to capitalism) many problems, the transitions discontents could have had a role in it. I can completely identify myself with the words of József N. Pál: „Such an author »writes« even when he isn't, therefore his work and it's lesson (moreover the consistent artistic behavior represented by himself!) is a silently present, formal mode of warning, affecting all of us.”

I set the intricate network of relationships of the literary work and the reality, and the determining role of moral and ethic in the focus, implicitly arguing with postmodern theories.

I have also tried to take account of the legend of the reticence and the available text snippets. I could find some forgotten texts in the 70's editions of the „Népszava”. I also used the interviews of the Petőfi Museum of Literature's sound archive and also published archive letters. Another novelty is, that I have processed the drama's original theatrical play's text-variations from 1968.

The novels of Ferenc Sánta have not been seen as a trilogy by neither contemporary nor new critics - but based on the different themes, the different technics of editing, and their reasonably distant historical periods I do not find this surprising. However, throughout the creation of my dissertation I have found several grounds which piece together as mosaics in the three novels, and I hope so that I could accurately demonstrate this. „Az ötödik pecsét”, the „Húsz óra” and „Az áruló” are perceptible as a triptych, and with this triptych, Sánta endorses the life kind-epic's fate, because - based on the messages of his novels - the epic's burden became arduous.

In my opinion it is obvious that what kind of essential unity do these three novels of Sánta represent. The recovered, the found and the hidden story: in the three approaches of history. And this realisation is important from the viewpoint of the writer's career, even more important from aesthetic aspects, but most important by the case of universal human edifications.

My further aims include the analysing process of the short stories, mainly in order to illustrate the writer's outlook on world. As Géza Vasy pointed it out for me, the most important link between political-history and the novels' plot world is the author itself, his experiences, adventures; and the investigation of the narratives would offer another possibility for forming a valid and full Sánta-picture.

It also seems like an exciting experiment to contrast the „20 órás riport” with the „Húsz óra”; it would worth studying what kind of modifications did Sánta apply on the novel's text compared to the journal-publications, and what kind of poetical consequences did these modifications have.

IV. List of Publications Related to the Thesis

Publications

FEKETE Sándor, *Az ötödik pecsét erkölcsi döntéshelyezetei*, Világosság, 2003/5–6, 231–236.

FEKETE Sándor, *Az ötödik pecsét, mint etikai irányregény = A Miskolci Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kara Tudományos Diákköri Közleményei 1.*, szerk. FAZEKAS Csaba, Miskolc, Egyetemi Kiadó, 2003, 68–73.

FEKETE Sándor, *Az utópia-műfaj karakteréről = A Miskolci Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kara Tudományos Diákköri Közleményei 1.*, szerk. FAZEKAS Csaba, Miskolc, Egyetemi Kiadó, 2003, 74–79.

FEKETE Sándor, *A társadalmi rend etikai dimenziói Apel-nél és Buchanan-nél = Értékválság – értékváltás*, szerk. KARIKÓ Sándor, Budapest, Áron Kiadó, 2004, 179–184.

FEKETE Sándor, *The Problem of Choice in Contract Theories = Publicationes Universitatis Miskolciensis (Sectio Philosophica)*, szerk. LENDVAI L. Ferenc, Miskolc, Egyetemi Kiadó, 2004, 59–64.

FEKETE Sándor, *Társadalmi törésvonalak a Húsz órában = Miskolci Politikatudományi Évkönyv 1.*, szerk. FAZEKAS Csaba, Miskolc, Miskolci Egyetem BTK Politikatudományi Intézete, 2008, 126–136.

FEKETE Sándor, *Időtlenség és emlékezet: Sánta Ferenc életműve = Új paradigmák II. Kultúra és kritika a humántudományokban*, szerk. BAKÓ Béla, Szombathely-Sopron, Nyugat-magyarországi Egyetem Kiadó, 2013, 21–37.

FEKETE Sándor, *A csönd, mint felszólító módú figyelmeztetés. A méltatlanul elfeledett Sánta Ferenc = Tanulmánykötet a 6. Báthory-Brassai nemzetközi konferencia előadásából*, 2. kötet, szerk. RAJNAI Zoltán, FREGAN Beatrix, MAROSNÉ KUNA Zsuzsanna, OZSVÁTH Judit, Budapest, Óbudai Egyetem Biztonságtudományi Doktori Iskola, 2015, 409–418.

FEKETE Sándor, *Az írói elhallgatás mint kinyilatkoztatás. Sánta Ferenc életműve*, Kolozsvár (kézirat megjelenésre elfogadva)

Conference Papers

FEKETE Sándor, *Az ötödik pecsét, mint etikai irányregény* (TDK-dolgozat). Elhangzott az ME BTK TDK-konferenciáján, 1999. november 23-án.

FEKETE Sándor, *Az ötödik pecsét, mint etikai irányregény* (OTDK-dolgozat). Elhangzott a PPKE BTK OTDK-konferenciáján, 2001. április 19-én.

FEKETE Sándor, „*Az ötödik pecsét*” *erkölcsi döntéshelyzetei*. Elhangzott a „Kijelentés, norma, cselekvés” címmel rendezett konferencián, az ELTE-n, 2002. szeptember 27-én.

FEKETE Sándor, *Az ötödik pecsét döntéshelyzetei*. Elhangzott a „Sánta Ferenc írói világa” c. konferencián, a Nyíregyházi Főiskolán, 2005. május 12-én.

FEKETE Sándor, *A világ egy traktorgyári munkás szemével. Sánta Ferenc regényeinek politikuma*. Elhangzott a XIV. Politológus Vándorgyűlésen, Noszvajon, 2008. június 28-án.

FEKETE Sándor, *Időtlenség és emlékezet: Sánta Ferenc életműve*. Elhangzott az „Új paradigmák II.” c. konferencián, a Nyugat-magyarországi Egyetem szombathelyi Savaria Egyetemi Központjában, 2012. szeptember 18-án.

FEKETE Sándor, *A csönd, mint felszólító módú figyelmeztetés. A méltatlanul elfeledett Sánta Ferenc*. Elhangzott a „6. Báthory-Brassai nemzetközi konferencián”, az Óbudai Egyetemen, 2015. május 28-án.

FEKETE Sándor, *Az elhallgatás alkotás-lélektani rejtélye: Sánta Ferenc életműve*. Elhangzott a „Grastyán Konferencián”, a Pécsi Tudományegyetemen, 2015. október 6-án.

FEKETE Sándor, *Az „Éjszaka” c. dráma bukásának lehetséges okai*. Elhangzott a „7. Báthory-Brassai nemzetközi konferencián”, az Óbudai Egyetemen, 2016. május 20-án.