



Stereotypes of Deficiency in the Hungarian Literature from Vojvodina in the Nineties of the Twentieth Century

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Abstract. The Hungarian literature of the wartime years in Vojvodina approaches deficiency from many aspects. The subject, experiencing a dangerous situation, loss, unsteadiness in the birthplace, possibly undertaking migration, is bound to the past, memories, mythological motifs, mytho-political or family myth, stressing the gesture of prayer and the polemicizing opportunities looking in this way for his national and/or local identity. The number of the local literary texts, of stereotypes connected to the local scenes, to the manner of minority existence and to the Balkan, increases, respectively, their ironic shifts get an outstanding role. This paper takes a close look at the stereotypes occurring in the contemporary texts in Vojvodina, at their theoretical concerns, actual occurrences, as well as at the “divided” mythization of the stereotypes. The retrospective view, the text apparently flowing backwards, the variety of private mythologies are attached to the disintegration of the homeland and family, namely to deficiency. From among the stereotypes there emerge, for example, the waste, some concrete space elements and the reinterpretation of the holiday, the blues or the edge. Besides the approach of the actual literary texts/text places, this research also focuses on the motif of the Kosztolányi cult in Szabadka emphasizing Europeanism.

Keywords: comparative literature, discursive strategy, communicative recollection, wartime migration, Kosztolányi cult

Big wheel and axis mentality

The volume of Đorđe Stanković, in which the context of the historical stereotype and knowledge comprehended in the scientific sense in the former Yugoslav area is approached from several viewpoints (*Historical Stereotypes and Scientific Knowledge* [Istorijski stereotipi i naučno znanje, 2004]), lays a particularly great emphasis on the dialogue of the past and present, respectively on its permeability. An old photo can be found on the cover, which can be interpreted as a motto or the model of the discursive strategy as well.

The photo highlights the funfairs' most outstanding accessory, (if you like its stereotype) the big wheel. The ones rising into the sky and the just downward ones are observable, as well as the separating position of the spectators (below) following them attentively. The recipient of the photo does not associate it with the repetitive circular motion, or maybe with the stereotype of the wheel of the history or the fate, but rather with the game itself, with its displacement, the ambivalence, the role of the fading shadows, with the monumental, fixed metal construction of the machinery, respectively with the axis.

The lower standpoint increases the sizes of pushing off from the land. The "dizzying" look of the elegant spectators waiting around the huts and trying to observe the ones sitting above becomes problematic. Thanks to the repeated circular motion the "passengers" disappear randomly into the distance, and they even turn into distant imaginaries, and some kind of (self)-reflection may accompany the lower approach of this (for example, desire and phobia, the known and the unknown, presence and absence, etc.). In this way, the representation of the big wheel brings up at the same time the discourse of the subject's self-representation.

In connection with imagology, István Fried emphasized the importance of the "release," the connection of imagology and intertextuality, respectively, the relation between imagology and the dynamics of the regional literary process. In his view, imagology is not a part of knowledge with ideological content, but it contributes to the interpretation of literary and intellectual story processes in a considerable measure, the substantive questions of comparative literature emerge in the course of stereotype research.

In terms of colonial discourse, the stereotype is a discursive strategy itself; the subject *turns round the axis of the stereotype* to return afterwards to the starting point of identification (see the photo of the big wheel on the mentioned cover). Homi K. Bhabha writes:

The stereotype as a complex and controversial faith announces and simultaneously rejects or hides the inequalities. Similarly to the mirror phase, the 'completeness' of the stereotype – the picture *as* identity – is also put at

risk by the ‘lack’. (...) It is easy to see the truth that the stereotypic marking chain is divided and mixed, polymorphic and perverse, in other words the complex faith articulates in it. The black man is simultaneously barbarian (cannibal) and the most obedient, most majestic servant (the waiter of the foods); the embodier of the unrestrained sexuality and the harmless child; mystic, primitive, plain and at the same time the most secular, the smartest liar, the most manipulator of the social strengths. In all cases his detachment dramatizes – *between* races, cultures, histories *in the course* of history –, the separation between the *before* and *after*, which obsessively repeats the mythical moment or separation. (Bhabha 2002, 638-639, 642-643)

“Discursive strategy,” communicative recollection, Balkan as a stereotype

In connection with the texts of Dezső Kosztolányi and Endre Kukorelly, Marko Čudić examined the Balkan pictures of the twentieth century Hungarian literature (Čudić 2007, 59), respectively the problem of the “frozen” Balkan that became known through Maria Todorova: according to Todorova, it is more than a stereotype, and works as a separate discourse. When studying the Hungarian literature in the nineties of the twentieth century, neither the setting into motion of the Balkan stereotypes, nor the examination of the connection between the Balkan-stereotypes and the homeland-discourses bringing up the problems of identity can be ignored.

For example, the interdisciplinary approach to the problem of the Balkan stereotypes and the sense of identity yielded a discussion in Magyarkanizsa, where the litter heaping or the burek were equally qualified as Balkan stereotypes (52nd Author Camp in Magyarkanizsa, Sociographic Workshop, 2004). The stage-settings of the nineties regularly employed the sight of the litter, in the similar way as István Németh’s *Home Altar* [*Házioltár*]. In the closure of the autobiographical ‘novel,’ the storyteller forms a disintegrated country, a virtual Yugoslavia from the waste piled up in the forge, from the trade names that nearly sank into oblivion, then István Németh’s volume entitled *Hegyalja Street* [*Hegyalja utca*] continues and increases the approach to the filth deluge, namely the approach to the sights of the wartime consequences and the experience of them. The motifs of Ottó Tolnai’s volume (2001) entitled *Balkan Glory* [*Balkáni babér*], which represents a performance in the border situation of the end of the war, likewise yielded some literary talks.

Dealing with Balkan is a stereotyped activity itself, Balkan is a discursive point of comparison in the wartime literature of the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina of the past century’s nineties, it has almost become a keyword (for example, the edge of Balkan, the mouth of Balkan, Balkan’s dirt, Balkan convict, our Balkan Lady Macbeth, burek, etc.). György Kálmán C. writes:

It has become interesting and discussable in Hungary since the eighties (even before the turn in 1989) what kind of common features or different directions the Hungarian and the Balkan cultures (and within this, literature) have in respect of poetics. It seems increasingly worth getting acquainted with the Romanian, Southern Slavic and even with the Turkish cultures: however, the motivation leading to this is, again, not primarily poetical, but historical/political. Understanding that it is the common (political, ideological) past that is in the background of the contact, connexion of our cultures. (Kálmán C. 2007, 56)

The wartime Hungarian literature in Vojvodina in the nineties draws the borderline of otherness and makes the edge of Balkan and its transformation more perceptible. For example, Ottó Tolnai in his volume entitled *Balkan Glory* or Ottó Fenyvesi's poem entitled *Cantus Firmus* refers to the alternation of the previous stereotypes. The latter text comments exactly on the change, in the year of the bombardment it ironically resists the Balkan stereotype emphasizing heroism, arising from Desanka Maksimović's poem (*Bloody Tale*), which all schoolboys and schoolgirls knew on their mother tongue in the unified Yugoslavia. The binary thinking similarly manifests itself in the nineties, that is, in the recent past, for example, the duality of faithful(ness) and leaver/ leaving prevails in a number of literary texts (cf. Stanković 2004, 263).

How can deficiency be comprehended?

The title of the paper does not refer to the deficiency of the stereotypes, but to the stereotypes of deficiency, namely to what arises from deficiency, from the specific viewpoint of the chain of deficiency and presence. Bhabha (2002) interprets the stereotype according to the term of fetishism, since the fetish hides deficiency and difference, and restores the original presence. The big wheel, from the sight of which we have set out, also indicated the opportunity of the game and oscillation.

If the researcher approaches the problem from the mentioned viewpoint, s/he can primarily find examples of it in migrant literature. In the nineties the major part of the Hungarian writers in Vojvodina departed from their homeland and this distance made possible the subsequent play-off onto the stereotypes, even more the interlude and at the same time the hiding of the experienced deficiency. Once these authors have arrived in Hungary, they continue writing the "southern topics," endeavour to cover and overcome the differences, although they are already creating according to the new lingual model. However, the viewpoints are diverse: they extend from the ironic one to the (de)mythicizing strategy.

The wartime texts of Ottó Tolnai proclaim the presence of the local scenes, the local stereotypes, they stress the intensive difference again and again and emphasize their anonymity abroad to an extent that an encyclopaedia-like note gets to the end of the Tolnai volumes in German language. By the objective fixations the migrant author aims for a discursive approach of the lack, for the restoration of the original presence.

The *acacia* marks out from the stereotypes arising from deficiency, about which, similarly to the Balkan, one can state that it is more than a stereotype. In the nineties the local scene indicating the formation of the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina became the accessory of a number of titles. This can be equally stated of the local and the migrant volume, and its significance has not finished with the wartime years. The locust tree becomes a fetish, it may even be the cultic tree implying redemption, absolution for the author/storyteller abandoning his homeland (see, for example, the title or the title giving novel of the story book appearing later, in 2004, though indicating the pre-war times – Sándor Majoros: *Our Locust Trees Live Long* [*Akácfaink sokáig élnek*]). The preservation of Balkan and the burek, what is more, the business perspective of the burek, which can be introduced in a prison, come into the limelight in Nándor Gion's short story entitled *Own Handed* [*Saját kezűleg*] (Gion 2004, 59-63), for example, the following stereotypes (arising from deficiency), more exactly the concepts, motifs, metaphors, etc. taking shape through stereotyping endeavour can be emphasized from the literature with home and migrant viewpoint of the nineties of the twentieth century: betrayal; barbarian; blues (e.g., István Szathmári: *Chicago Blues* [*Csikágói blues*], Ottó Fenyvesi: *Blues above the Ocean* [*Blues az óceán felett*]); (the) edge of Balkan; family; leaver(s); ex (ex), Ex-YU, Ex-YU- Ex(odus) (Thomka 2009, 35-50); wartime screen; faithfulness; infidelity; strange; identity; prayer; Indian (indicates the minority being); yoghurt; chosen; Feast (the ironic question of Attila Balázs is aimed at the historical cookbooks as well); feast gathering; junk, junk-clearance; perpendicular (perpendicular motion orbits, the breaking of the linearity); media; myth, mythical; great Yugoslavity; from over there (from Hungary); lead; edge, edge feeling, confine, centre and edge (periphery); hell (indicates the wartime situation, the country's collapse; shopping bag (at the time of the escape the individual takes it with him); refuse dump (state); filth speech; oration, festive oration; homeland (as the home and the national stereotypes being attached to it); wasting, wasteful (dad, father); mass grave culture; sea (and sea discourse as narrative heritage); holiday, celebration, feast, "everyday" holiday, the holiday as bagatelle, celebration of the sea, frequent in volume titles as well, profanation; change; blood; Leader; country; tram (mythization and metaphorization of the tram brought to an end in Szabadka (Subotica); dead end, deadlock (blind street as well).

If today's receiver looks through these concepts in a dictionary-like manner, it can be pointed out that in the nineties the Hungarian writers from Vojvodina – whether staying at home or leaving – also struggled for literary language, the regenerative endeavours are traceable. The listed concepts are connected to the confusion of identity, and may be operated as stereotypes. It is worth paying separate attention to the discursive strategies formed within an author's oeuvre and also to their combinations (for example, tracing back the *delta* in Ottó Tolnai's or in István Domonkos's opera, becoming emphasized again after the nineties) (Thomka 2009, 160-161).

Proper names – stereotypes with mythic and literary origins

In the nineties the dangerous situation of the homeland ironically agitated, namely demythicized or abroad even mythicized the local scenes, more precisely those stereotype manifestations that the researchers and authors from Vojvodina equally criticized in the second half of the sixties.

The role of the stereotype may have been fulfilled/may be fulfilled, for example, by the authors' names fitting into the tradition of a city or a locality. The name of Szabadka has become interwoven with the names of Géza Csáth and Dezső Kosztolányi and with the motifs taken over from them, with repetitive turns, moments connected to their biography, in many cases with some kind of absent value, strangeness, trauma. For example, the play-off to the magician's garden can be found in Géza Csáth's *The Magician's Garden* [*A varázsló kertje*] or the denomination Palicsfürdő, which has been introduced by Ottó Tolnai in the course of the reception of the Csáth spa doctor and the world literature spa scenes. Naturally, these two names have had an effect beyond the borders of Szabadka, they mean some kind of bases and grasping of values in Bácska, at the same time they function as a stereotype (as well). Kosztolányi's hero, Kornél Esti, enters the scene in the German translation of Christina Viragh as the hero of his age, whereas in the Hungarian literature from Vojvodina he becomes rather the hero of our age. The most representative evidence of this is Árpád Nagy Abonyi's retrospective novel, *Budapest, retour* (2008), bringing up the problems of migration, emigration, the "changing ends" in the nineties, in which the hero reminds of Kornél Esti. From among the mythological names we can highlight Hephaestus and Dionysus.

Literary cult in a stereotype?

The traditions of the Kosztolányi cult in Subotica/Szabadka (S. Gordán 2010, 18-24), which remained in mystery up to the forties, its moments that can be traced more precisely until 1960, date back to organizing the *The Sign of Life* [Életjel] living newspaper's birthday programme by moving the masses, but we can also mention 1959, when an evening programme in Szabadka was held in the memory of Csáth, later of Ernő Lányi.

However, the regular celebration of the Dezső Kosztolányi Days began in 1991 and with some exceptions is attached to his birthday in March. Of course, the cultic activity itself, the collective recollection presupposes and requires stereotypical moments. In the wartime years the cult had been consciously initiated, created almost from the very first moment and made widely known through the media, the stereotype of being *European* or of *European rank* being attached to Kosztolányi. Europeanism is not only the stereotype of world literature value, but also the outbreak, the desire of Kosztolányi's fans to break through the closed world originated from the war, the expression of the hiding of the deficiency. The visitors of Szabadka, the lecturers participating in the Kosztolányi-discussion and the articles that appeared in the press also emphasize this absent identity, Europeanism. The bibliography of the press's reaction provides an overview of the stereotypes repeated in the titles, since the journalists and representatives of other media took the idea from the toasts, festive speeches. Some titles from the press are as follows: *Kosztolányi's Europeanism* [Kosztolányi európaisága] (1993), *Remembering the Poet of European Rank* [Emlékezés az európai rangú költőre], *A Hundred Per Cent European Writer* [Ízig-vérig európai író] (1996), *Kosztolányi's Intellectual and Ethical Heritage: Yesterday on a scientific discussion people remembered the author of a European rank by laying a wreath on his bust and memorial plaque* [Kosztolányi szellemi és erkölcsi öröksége: Tegnap tudományos tanácskozáson, mellszobrának és emléktáblájának megkoszorúzásával emlékeztek az európai rangú íróra] (2001). The martial highlighting of the European identity presupposed audacity in the nineties when the Western European sanctions got stronger and stronger (Kiss 2007). Kosztolányi's birthplace, the commemorative well in Palics lacking the Kosztolányi quotation, the rite of wreathing Kosztolányi's sculpture or memorial plaque or its depraving, practically work as stereotypes. István Szathmári's short story, *The Story of My Resigning* [Fölmondásom története], coming into being in the border situation of moving to Budapest, precisely approaches the separation from the stereotype moments, pulling away from his work as a teacher in grammar school, undertaking migration with the help of sight fractions of the Kosztolányi cult. Despite the circumstances still prohibiting somehow the celebration, the storyteller focuses on the *being*, on the existing Kosztolányi sculpture in Szabadka that screens the

deficiency for a moment and means an identity crutch as well. The next text-place can be pointed out from the perspective of the fluctuation of deficiency and the present:

I did not bring my bag. What for? I am looking at the school's building, the huge, multi-storeyed, big attic (there are all kinds of odds and ends, garbage, sculpture, a flag out of fashion, tassel, shield, paper, documents up there) polar house, the oak tree gate, the black signboard on the wall. Further on Kosztolányi's greying sculpture, this lonely, jerking head as he tries to smile, laugh, but does not come in anyway, not, he cannot be here, we were staying there not a long time ago, entirely close to him, there were many people, many people, it was a feast, recitations, wreath, commonplace of course but we swaggered beside him after all, it was raining, the water was rattling in the trashy channels of the nearly houses, people roaming that way slowed down, a woman in patchy apron came out from the opposite shop, I saw it, the students also stared outward the window, though there may have been a class, I experienced all these amidst such odd feelings, I was thinking about a lot of things even then, but I was pleased to stand there entirely close to the sculpture, to know I had someone to stand near, it was so good that could not be defined, and well then there the building, the city, the rain was just pouring. (Szathmári 1995, 64)

István Szathmári's short story, respectively the highlighted text can be examined from an imagological aspect as well. The personal recollection is directed towards the border situation of the change, when the stereotype accessories of an old political, ideological identity form a rubbish heap on the attic of the grammar school (a similarly changing institution) but in the middle of the nineties the additional perspective cannot be defined yet, the direction of the transformation cannot be seen. Some trivial moments of the Kosztolányi cult mean a handhold, resistance, from the storyteller's viewpoint the fractions of the cultural and communicative recollection become interwoven, the urban context of everyday automatism becomes more and more important. The identity change brings a change in the sculpture (e.g., the disappearance of Moša Pijade's old sculpture from the grammar school's staircase), the storyteller also speaks about the old ideology with aloofness. With the consciousness of having decided to migrate, it felt good to hold on to the sculpture of the literary man born in the native town and in the town, with which he might almost have been identified, even if the lack of appreciation from certain people manifested itself.

Distant viewpoints – the vision of a Swiss novel

The success story of Melinda Nadj Abonji (Melinda Nagy Abonyi), of descent from Óbecse, entitled *Tauben fliegen auf* (2010), from the temporal and spatial (Swiss) prospect emphasizes and repeats those local and cultural stereotypes that are accessories of this landscape and of people living here, for example, of the Kocsis family. The strangeness of the chocolate brown Chevrolet, which is uncommon in the area of Vojvodina, is not known from the Swiss perspective, however, the viewpoint can be changed and hereby it becomes clear that from the Vojvodinan or Central European viewpoint there live merely ingrown, superficial stereotypes about Switzerland. The emigrant family members are induced to commute to newer and newer homes and family reunions whenever a wedding party or a death occurs. Ildikó's narrative viewpoint focuses on the recurrences and pursuit of homeland, in some cases on the punchline-like moments not foreign to the anecdote. The novel primarily refers to the intensive, yet diverse gastronomic stereotypes, to the significance of the lowland, avenue through the woods, to the trees (locust, poplar, chestnut tree), moreover, to the air, the airflow, the tillage, to the mud and dust, to the buildings (fence, summer kitchen), to the border and border crossing, to the shreds of the Hungarian lingual identity, as well as to the eighties and the wartime period. The connection of the lowland and the sea is yet a stereotypic moment, since the lowland – according to the narrator's reflection – by its own laws devours everything like the sea.

Is the world big in small?

It can be pointed out that in the nineties of the twentieth century the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina generated several stereotypes, respectively stereotype changes with the help of the media (Jael Lehmann 2008, 9-14). The problem of identity was intensified, the roots (the relation to the homeland, the national stereotype as the common, newer dilemma expressing itself in the Hungarian texts in Vojvodina) became more important from the perspective of the remaining and migrant authors than until that time. The cultural stereotypes, which strengthened group cohesion, deserve special attention, since the cultic activities, the literary evenings, the number of local knowledge camps, of teacher training courses was growing in a considerable measure in the nineties, and feasts moved the masses and differentiated the cultural stereotypes.

The national questions resulted in differentiating the (collective and individual) *inside* as well, and this separation manifested itself both in the literary life and in the concept of the editorial offices of the journals, publications. The process of stereotyping as the major part of the literary, cultural or sociological relations mainly arose from the deficiency of the competence, from power

cognition following from the exterior war relationships, and from sensing danger on the part of those in the situation of minority existence. In this period, in the dimension of the Hungarian literature mostly value and revaluation, respectively diverse content were attached to the stereotypes. With regard to the stereotypes concerning the outsiders, separation can be observed on the basis of warm-hearted and perceived competence (Fiske et al. 2006, 328). It can be noticed in the literary texts that the situation of the subject, the “person cognition,” the stereotypic, though vital question of whether “to go or stay” becomes stressed. If the researcher examines the Hungarian literature of the nineties, the consideration of retrospective texts from the two thousand years cannot be omitted.

From an imagological viewpoint, Attila Balázs’s novel entitled *For Some North, for Some South* [*Kinek Észak, kinek Dél*] (2008) ironically sets into motion the disappeared Tito clichés, Tito’s little America, the realm moulder, myth creator and medial endeavours of the civil war, furthermore, it labels Kornél Szenteleky’s theory about local scenes as an *adhesived* theory. The artistic view is very complex, it often becomes interwoven with politics, according to the storyteller it is still an experiment of understanding.

The examined stereotypes are primarily attached to communicative recollection. The stereotypes researched now came into existence in the wartime situations, they turn up again and again in literature nowadays, get displaced on the basis of the viewpoint changes, however, with the progress of time these disappear and are reinterpreted (Assmann 2004, 51-53). The pursuit of securing, rethinking the stereotypes of the wartime era in our days – increasingly under the pretext of the changing vision – still works powerfully.

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