

Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities

ABSTRACTS OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

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**IDENTITY AS TEXTUAL EXPERIENCE IN ROMANTIC AND
CONTEMPORARY HUNGARIAN LITERATURE**

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1. The subject and methods of the dissertation

The concept and practice of identity are placed in the conceptual matrix of individual and community, individual and history, present and past, local and temporal expand. The concept of identity presents itself – even modified – in every social and cultural science. The *identity boom* and *identity talk* that were first noticed in the 1980's also connect to human studies', especially literature theory, cultural anthropology and history studies crisis of self-interpretation. One of the cultural critical conversations' main discretion inside anthropology is, also known as the "Writing Culture-discussion" after James Clifford, Clifford Geertz and George E. Marcus' works, that most of the ethnographical and anthropological methods places the identity of the observed to the center instead of the observed themselves. The same idea appears in those tendencies of literature studies that focuses on cults and read both text and culture as textual and ritual entities.

The concepts of individual, family, communal, ethnical, religious, sexual, political or national identity determine each other as well: their synchronic and diachronic extent oftentimes makes them inseparable. According to the present thesis, identity is not a capability but a procedure, simpler told it is not the question of fate but the question of choices, consisting of complicated practices. However, this was not always obvious, but became a cliché in the postmodern area. Identity, as its simplest determination says, means personal oneness and continuity, the complex of those premises that helps the personality's integrity the most. Historical time, social space, family effects, the primary affect the premises and secondary frames of socialization that are also affected as well. Thus identity is a practice under persistent recreation that similarly to the text gets the possibility of recreation in the exigency of rereading. Models that come into existence in the identity's lingual experiences in the literature show that in social practice language is the primary subject of mental representation, thus cognition is materialized through lingual representation. The stake of the battle fought for identity is the existence authorized by cognition and perception: the experience of identity coming to existence in the literary text is a dual lingual representation thus, and means dual battle in the symbolic spaces of the text and society as well. The thesis saying writing is an identification act strengthens that despite of construction's nature – or because of it – text, just like identity, is not a closed system. Text is a model of understanding and explanation in the acts of re-

reading and re-writing, just like the process of identity questioning its own fixed found.

The dissertation – besides many others – stands on Michel Foucault's late theory of the technologies of the self. The technologies of the self, by allegorizing the practices of antiquity and early Christianity, suggests to create a system that while defining identity, focuses more on the individual comparing to Foucault's earlier work, yet emphasizes its connection to the discourse. Paul de Man's *Autobiography as De-Facement* is an important essay in the regard of the analyzed texts' autobiographical definiteness and the examination of the self-narration and autofiction created through family relations.

The advantage of the interdisciplinary approach is that it makes those concepts more toned which are indispensable from the view of both the individual and communal identity regarding the identity's textual context, thus the concepts of space, colony, culture and self shall become more complex. In my dissertation I am trying to adopt the different kind of discretions of social studies' polemics through texts that can show us the cultural and literary representation of these problems, thus they are functional both in a textual and a ritual way. This essay, through the different terms, ideological constructions and models of identities examines the individual and communal identity's narration, the contexts affecting on each other, and the different past-present relations, by means of the terms knowledge, power, ideology, narrative, desire, historicalness, fiction, cultural memory, subject, body, visibility, textuality, rituality, embedness and ekphrasis.

2. The hypothesizes and proportions of the dissertation

In the first, introductory chapter (*Introduction: text and identity*) I review the most known tendencies of identity theories and the most important statements of Michel Foucault and Charles Taylor about identity, and mark the essay's further directions as well. In chapter two (*Textualizing the nation*) I am presenting the most significant tendencies of nationalism studies, the modernist and ethnosymbolist (primordialist) approaches and the peculiarities of the Hungarian nationalism, and also the relation of text and society, the importance of literary texts in society studies. The critical cogitation of nationalist ideologies carries the nation, the community, the

ethnical and cultural identity, the cosmopolitanism, and the critical analysis of the nation's homogen and heterogen constructions automatically, that can not dispense with a contextual conclusion either. As identity became a cultural good, nation and nationalism became moral, ethic and cultural currency through the different symbolic deals presented in the essay. The community's criterions can be objective and subjective as well, but we must not forget the terms myth, memory, identity, culture, language, history and historicalness.

In chapter three (*Instead of fathers*) I am arguing for the ideologicalness of scientific writing, mainly based on Péter Dávidházi's discretions in his monography *Egy nemzeti tudomány születése* („Born of a national science”) through Ferenc Toldy's identitical and cultural changes. For this I am using Dávidházi's significant statement which says that the epic's nation interpretation in the first tierce of the 19th century will be important not only for the historical novel, but rather for the national literature history. Connecting to this, and to the narration of the individual, the community and the nation I try to analyse the metaphorical sub-genre of the „father novel” as it may become a normative intrepretive category in Hungarian literary criticism. Important hypothesis of the third chapter is that the textual experience of identity holds a center position in texts that set up social identity through personal identity, following a practice of the 19th century to create ethnical and political identity through the metaphorical expands of blood-relations.

The fourth chapter (*Not jewish jew, not narrating narrator*) contains the analysis of Péter György's work *Apám helyett* („Instead of my father”) which mixes the codes of fictional and non-fictional literature by creating a specific, figurative mode of narration. Based on the social experiences of various dictatorships built on silence and supression, the text is positioning social identity both into the context of social history and personal fate.

In chapter five (*Vörösmarty disfigured*) by introducing the former and recent results of research on 19th century Hungarian poet Mihály Vörösmarty, I try to argue that the force to write an epic poem about the settlement of Hungarians in the firs half of the 19th century has framed a metatopical space within the narration of the nation that was fictional in the first place. The modes of these narrative techniques were

related to the notion of cult rather than history. In this chapter I also try to re-read some important epic works of Mihály Vörösmarty from the sight of postmodern identity theories and contemporary literary and social practices. Besides illustrating the failure of the representative national epic poem of the settlement in Hungary, in chapter five I also examine the relations between Vörösmarty's epic poems *A' Rom* and *Tündérvölgy* and contemporary writer Endre Kukorelly's novels with the same titles (*Rom*, *TündérVölgy*).

The sixth chapter of the dissertation (*Paraphrasing the representative discourse*) summarizes many of previous statements by exploring Endre Kukorelly's autobiographical text *Országközi divatok*. In this chapter I argue that this work is not just a personal journal or a documental novel, but adopts a structure based on fragments, and tells the failure of not just the political, but the personal representation of identity.

In the seventh and final chapter (*Identity as textual experience*) shortly I mention that despite of discursive practices of power tend to homogenize national, ethnic, religious, sexual identities it seems so that heterogeneous cultural systems and alternative models of identity are forming the terms of their own visibility. Supporting this hypothesis I shortly analyse Krisztina Tóth's novel *Akvárium*, which was published in 2013. I assume that the evolve of mentalities linked to various strategies of writing and reception, has begun in some identific practices defined by power discourses of the 19th century. Thus it is possible that the dissertation did not follow a chronological line from romantics to contemporary whilst exploring various fictional and non-fictional works.

The main goal of this doctoral thesis is to show the way from those 19th century's myths of origin built on fiction and vague historical references, to various discourses of postmodern literature and metafiction. They have many causes and effects and naturally many differences as well. To expand a personal genealogy into a common one may as well be a contemporary strategy (*Apám helyett, TündérVölgy*) as the paraphrase of the representative discourse based upon twisting former traditions (*Országközi divatok*). In the last chapter by introducing some deconstructive and post-colonial theory on nation and identity I try to illustrate that „nation” is a construction

that is more like a strategy than a community, and it shows its boundaries within the politics of representation. From stating organic communities, such subjects and communities have come through that were muted signs before, but now are writing, narrating and representing themselves, questioning linear narratives, and opposed against the continuity of historical traditions. The varied structures of identities could no longer be forced back into homogeneous settings. Exploring the notions of writing, language, text, narration, fiction and reference recites the processes of representation have been forming within the language.

3. Publications related to the topic of the dissertation

„Ilyen álarccal csalják a világot” – Don Juan alakjának metaforizálódása és a hazugság cselekvésértéke in Kalligram 2010/12.

„Olly szörnyű volt éjjel a’ tündérvölgyi lak” – A romantikus pretextusok narrativizálódásának lehetőségei Kukorelly Endre egyes szövegeiben in Parnasszus 2011/ősz

Az én médiatechnológiai – A test mint médium a kortárs kultúrában in Replika 2011/3, 103-123.

Hipszterek és kószálók– A közösségi identitás elbeszélhetősége a fogyasztás és az ellenkultúra fogalmai mentén in Symposion-Híd Vizuális Kultúra, 2012. december, 86-96.

„How to not be here” – The Construction and Re-Construction of Memory and Remembrance in W. G. Sebald’s two novels (with Nikolett Antal) in Asteriskos 3., Budapest, Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 2012, 5-17.