

**Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar**

**DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ**

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**The coherence of aesthetics and politics in Tibor Déry's art  
between 1945 and 1956**

**– Thesis –**

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Literary works dealing with the series of events in “*Felelet*” certify – as it must have been seen in the time of the polemic – fundamental, symbolic events occurred in the autumn of 1951 in the Central Office of the Hungarian Workers Party. Hungarian literature was expected to follow the Soviet pattern. The aim of the debate, which was organized on the publication of the second volume of Tibor Déry’s novel, would have been to make order definitively after several, sometimes hardly understandable changes of direction in literary politics. It would have been the responsibility of decision makers in the field of literary politics in the Party. Conversely, it is clear nowadays that this attempt at organizing was one of the last, desperate attempts of the Révai culture politics to force the writers’ loyalty and – according to the relevant section of Tamás Scheibner’s work “*A magyar irodalomtudomány szovjetizálása*” – to engrave on stone the language and system of the rules of the socialist realistic criticism.

In my thesis I also reason that in the debate occurring in the autumn of 1952, not only Tibor Déry but practically all contemporary writers were accused or accusers. I do not dispute the right of those approaches which claim that the importance of “*Felelet*” is in the reactions and consequences generated by itself, however, in my opinion the debate can not be clearly understandable without the analysis of the novel. The scientific literary works which I have become familiar with, seem not to take the facts into consideration that Déry’s attempt to write *the* Hungarian socialist realistic novel, although it can not be called successful, it resulted in one of the most important, most effective novels of the era. It follows, that it makes a difference in what is stated in the two volumes of the novel, even if those assumptions are right which claim that a similar event would have occurred sooner or later without the “*Felelet*” debate.

In the first part of my thesis – after presenting the literary field formed after the Second World War and interpreting Déry’s place in this field (based on Pierre Bourdieu’s terminology) – I reveal the way from the preparations for the novel to the debate: during the analysis I intend to turn the attention to these points of the novel which can be interpreted as contrary gestures of the expectations in literary politics and at the same time draw attention to some attributes of the text which enhance it from the literature of the era. Among those attributes can be listed that approach which can be seen in György Lukács’s realism theory and Déry’s writing style. György Lukács was in position until 1949, after that he was disregarded. Naturally, Déry would be treated unfairly if it was claimed that “*Felelet*” was written according to Lukács’s recipe, in my thesis several arguments are presented for the statement that the philosopher’s realistic aesthetic made in the 1930s had a great influence on the novel written between 1948

and 1952 but it remained unfinished. The recordings found in Déry's legacy and in contemporary correspondence with Lukács are the clear signs of the good personal and occasionally tighter or looser working relationship between the two authors in the years of writing "*Felelet*". One of the most impressive elements of the Lukács effect is that "*Felelet*" was not written on the sample of production novels typical of the time, but it followed the steps of the 19<sup>th</sup> century realist authors. It means that Déry broke with the modern realism used in his previous novel "*A befejezetlen mondat*", which reflects Proust, Thomas Mann and Kafka's effect. He turned to a more transparent narrative language with one great step back. The schematic style typical for 1950s literature and the narrative style recalling the structure of hagiography was strange for Déry, so it was obvious that his novel did not follow the style of works published in the era. The conception of realism outlined in Lukács's writings must have seemed a reasonable compromise for Déry to write the first great Hungarian socialist realist novel. This can be the reason why the protagonist in this developmental novel, Bálint Köpe is not a determined communist but a moralising, sceptical workingman. This kind of approach made by Déry – in an unusual way for the era – makes the vulnerability to the circumstances the prime mover of the plot instead of the linear development. One of the most important risks of the "*Felelet*" debate was how Hungarian literature could describe the course of life of a typical workingman (and in the character of Zeno Farkas a typical intellectual, in the characters of Júlia Nagy and Péter Brányik illegal communists). It was a really difficult job to do in the light of the fact that the Party had not prepared the official historical narration yet. As it was later revealed, Déry's suggestion to make the Hungarian socialist realism was not accepted. The "*Felelet*" debate – in addition to that it might be interpreted as an attack against the whole Hungarian writer society, as a ritual act organised similarly to show trials – can be interpreted as the final settling with literature rejected during the Lukács debate. The chapter dealing with the "*Felelet*" debate demonstrates this process from the publication of the positive criticism on the second volume, to the first condemnation, and the final rejection.

After revealing the events of the "*Felelet*" debate I analyse the effects of the debate on Déry himself and on his works. The approach of my thesis differs from the other works published on this issue because I intend to read the author's texts written after 1952, not as illustrations of the literary politics typical of the era but inversely: I draw my conclusion from the works and the reactions generated by the interpretation of the works.

In the second and third part of my thesis I intend to find out – the basis of the texts written right after the “*Felelet*” debate – what changes occurred in Déry’s poetics in the literary ideal typical of the 1950s and in this relation to the literary politics. In my opinion to the revelation of this “literary kremlinologic” knowledge – resolutions of the Party, cultural political decisions automatically compared with the process of literature – is not enough. I consider it necessary to construct a lineal timeline, which helps to see the process sweeping Déry away from the official literary of the era. The chapters of this part of my thesis analyze his typical works. I intend to reveal the author’s possible reasons and to analyze the aesthetical formation of the texts as well. For example the first of Déry’s work after publishing the second volume of the “*Felelet*” is “*Bálint elindul*” film script. It was written in 1953 and on the presentation of the film script, a great emphasis was placed on the circumstances of the text birth – on the demand by József Révai to write a script, the relation between the script and “*Felelet*”, the different historical views represented by the two works – otherwise without them it would be difficult to place it in the author’s oeuvre.

I do the same with Déry’s other novel published in 1953, “*Simon Menyhért születése*”: according to my assumptions this work was the author’s first text which reflects his antipathies against the literary political system. His antipathy became more and more explicit and it opened the way to the mainly forgotten satiric Déry works. In the chapter about “*Simon Menyhért születése*” with pointing out the ironic language in the novel and the intentional emphasising of the narrator I draw attention to those aspects of the text which can be interpreted as the parody of socialist realist aesthetic.

In the third part of my thesis – after a short chapter dealing with the growing popularity of the genre – Déry’s satires written in 1954, “*A talpsimogató*” one act play and a novel started with István Örkény but remained unfinished (after Déry’s death Örkény published it) the “*Három nap az Aranykagylóban*” came into the centre.

In my opinion, “*A talpsimogató*”, in which the light criticism of the political system is presented and which uses the relevant tool of the Molière theatre, actually Tartuffe’s tool to record the experience, can be connected to the novel criticized two years earlier as well as the sarcastic style of “*Három nap az Aranykagylóban*”. I think Déry’s short stories and novels written between 1955 and 1956 – for example “*Niki*”, “*Szerelem*” and “*A téglafal mögött*” belong to the author’s masterpieces – could not have been born without going along the way documented in my thesis. With the picture drawn by the work portraits put next to each other

I intend to suggest how strongly “*Felelet*” and the polemic after the publication affected Déry’s career before 1956. The evidence of this can be found in the fourth part of my thesis, in which my aim was to reconstruct – on the basis of the unpublished documents probably born in 1955-56 and kept in the Déry legacy in Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum – the plans of the third volume. Although, Déry himself mentioned several times that he had lost his interest finishing the course of novels due to the effect of the debate, which in the remained documents present between 1955-56, he took into consideration how to use the moral of the debate in finishing his work. Finally the novel cycle did not reach the stage of the third and fourth volumes; however, Déry sketched several alternatives in the radio and television adaptations made in the 1970s to settle the story. I deal with these texts in the last chapter. It in my belief, the failure of the plans made to continue the novel can be symbolic. The author, who took part in the preparation for the revolution was sentenced to prison, had no chance and after the release had neither chance, nor mood to settle the novel. The morals of the suppression of the revolution did not encourage the author to continue the socialist realist basically optimist aesthetic, but to draw a satiric and depressive view presented in “*G. A. úr X.-ben*” and in “*A kiközösítő*”. It is conspicuous that after these works – the novel “*Ítélet nincs*” written in 1969 can be considered as his last important work – at the end of his life – his reason is understandable he took smaller risks: in his last novels (“*Képzelt riport egy amerikai pop-fesztiválról*”, “*A félfülű*”, “*A gyilkos és én*”, “*Kedves bópeer...!*”) he gave up finding the novel form which could be acquired by social and historical science. “*Felelet*” was made into a radio play and drama series, and their short, strange settlements are clear signs: the questions pressed by “*Felelet*” were too hard to try and find the right answers, even in Kádár’s Hungary in the 1970s.

Mainly the contemporary documents kept in the Déry legacy helped me to write my thesis. Some of them were published in the volume of Déry Archivum containing documents between 1945 and 1957, edited by Ferenc Botka and in the volumes of Déry’s correspondence between 1945 and 1950, and between 1951 and 1955; however, several documents, which have been unexplored so far, can be found in PIM. For example the above mentioned sketches in which Déry counts the chances for the third volume of “*Felelet*”, and the Interior Ministry documents about the most successful leaders of the Hungarian factories were used to form one of the protagonists, Bálint Köpe in the first two volumes. Those unknown letters, which were written by István Örkény to György Kardos and by György Kardos to György Aczél,

found in László Gyurkó's legacy dealing with the publication of "*Három nap az Aranykagylóban*" novel.