



Book Reviews

Non-Euclidean Study of Literature

Judit Pieldner

**Bíró, Béla. *Eszmélet és körkörösség. [Consciousness and Circularity.]*
Miercurea Ciuc: Pallas-Akadémia, 2008. 359. pp.**

University professor Béla Bíró's latest volume represents a novelty in the field of literary analysis. It starts from the approach of Attila József's poem entitled *Eszmélet (Consciousness)*, and grows into a scientific treatise which far exceeds the dimension of literary criticism.

We can have no doubts about the philosophical depth of this lyrical masterpiece, about its central position in Attila József's oeuvre and in Hungarian culture. Several interpretations of the poem—even contradictory ones—have come to light, which testify not only the inexhaustible richness of the literary work, but also the fact that this text has often been misunderstood, misinterpreted, even monopolized by various interpreting communities.

Béla Bíró's approach is unconventional, because it explores the plurality of meanings of the text, summarizes the apparently incompatible contradictions accumulated in the existing interpretations, and distinguishes the examined poem as being the starting point of an interdisciplinary discourse, surpassing the limits of literary theory. Considering Attila József's philosophy of art, as well as the spatial-temporal structure of the poem, it turns out that the problems formulated in the language of poetry are not only individual, not only basically human, but more than that, they are of universal significance.

The author of the volume points out that a thorough understanding of the poem can be carried out by interpreting it in relation to the hypothesis of the circularity of universe. The artistic text generates revelations which can open up

new perspectives also for scientific cognition. This calls forth the distinctiveness of the argumentation of the present volume: by confronting literary, philosophical and scientific concepts and arguments, it elaborates a mixed, but still highly coherent scientific language, supporting the idea that following the logic of common sense as well as the principle of scientific unambiguity, even the seemingly complicated matters become accessible. Mathematical calculations, physical formulae as well as cosmological argumentations equally find their place in the text. The idea of the circularity of universe, the system of arguments resorting to the terminology of various disciplines provide a unique spiritual enjoyment also for readers not primarily interested in literary criticism.

Taking into account the principle of circularity, it is not only the paradoxes of *Consciousness* that are put in different new light, but the arbitrariness of interpretation—so fashionable nowadays—is also unveiled. The series of studies, fusing into a major argumentation, brings the so-called postmodern theories, stemming from unfounded, irrational or erroneous ideas, back to the firm soil of common sense, by arguing that “life cannot be irrational, that is, the Universe would come to nothing because of a single really insoluble contradiction”.

To sum up, the volume in question is notable, on the one hand, for the elaborated interdisciplinary discourse, on the other hand, for the quality of thoughts that pave the way for new paradigms both in the study of literature and in scientific thinking.

From Film to Literature—from Literature to Film

Enikő Bíró

Judit Pieldner: *Beszédterek, képterek. Tanulmányok, kritikák.* [Word Spaces, Image Spaces. Studies, Critiques.] Cluj Napoca: Komp Press Publishing House, 2007. 241. pp.

The writings included in this volume are grouped into two sections and cover two domains accordingly: the first, longer unit includes studies which discuss various aspects of the relationship between words and images, film and literature, the second unit comprises literary critiques.

(*Image Spaces*) As the essays of the first unit prove it, the study of the relationship between film and literature requires an interdisciplinary approach, which makes use of the observations of both literary and film theory. The introductory chapter is a survey of the terminological and methodological questions related to adaptation. It provides the theoretical basis for the following essays, case studies in fact, which examine the narrative and rhetorical specificities of some adaptations in particular. The so-called reflexive adaptations are in the focus of attention, these initiate fruitful dialogues with the literary sources and elaborate various self-reflexive strategies. From the field of English literature, three novels from three distinct periods are examined in parallel with their film version, a premodern, a modern and a postmodern text respectively, namely, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The comparative analyses highlight the metafictional character of the texts themselves, as well as the corresponding film devices by which the adaptations try to respond to the challenge set up by literature. Further analyses focus on similar questions, applied to Hungarian adaptations. The comparative method in the present volume extends beyond literature and film, to the relationship between film and other arts, between documentary and fiction, between narration and reflexion, applied to Gábor Bódy's experimentalism in Hungarian film, to Iranian films and to Peter Greenaway's Neo-Baroque film style respectively. The analyses rely on contemporary results in the fields of narratology and film studies, and point out the cross-influence and interdependence of the spheres of the verbal and the visual.

(*Word Spaces*) The literary critiques collected in the second part of the volume provide an insight into the realm of literary publications from Transylvania and Hungary after 1990. These critiques follow current literary events, by evaluating and interpreting contemporary young poets, prose writers, essayists, literary historians (among them Szilárd Borbély, László Lövétei Lázár, Laura Iancu, Edit Boda, Anna Szabó T., Csaba Székely, Vince Fekete, Zsuzsa Selyem, Imre József Balázs, Júlia Vallasek). The critiques reflect on phenomena of contemporary literature and elaborate various strategies of reading and interpretation.

The two sections of the volume discuss topics that apparently have little in common. However, in my opinion it is the challenge of interpretation that links the two chapters, whether applied to films or to books. I recommend this volume to all those who are eager to know how to "read" films and who wish to be introduced to a segment of contemporary Hungarian (study of) literature.

Literary Canon, Intertextuality, Cult
Judit Pieldner

Tapodi, Zsuzsa: *A soha el nem vesző könyv nyomában.* [On the Track of the Book which Never Gets Lost.] Miercurea Ciuc: Pallas-Akadémia, 2008. 307. pp.

The studies included in senior lecturer and literary historian Zsuzsa Tapodi's latest volume are connected with three distinct, but also interrelated research domains, specified by the three terms highlighted above.

The studies of the first chapter examine the complex phenomenon of literary canons, providing an insight into the methodology of their research. By resorting to the observations of contemporary trends of literary theory, the author seeks answers to the questions how the system of canonical literary texts, representing prevailing standards and values, is formed, in what ways the various texts become classical, which literary canons coexist within the same period, how they change in different ages of literary history under the influence of various ideologies, which texts are highly appreciated in a particular historical period and lose all their value in another one, what are the factors under the influence of which literary works get from the center to the periphery, and vice versa. These are questions that cannot be ignored by any professional engaged in the study of literature. The educational process, the syllabus well reflect the current state of literary canons. In general, readers are profoundly influenced by these ever changing processes, which determine their reading and value preferences. The studies draw attention to the fact that the examined questions are becoming of special interest nowadays, in the age of multiculturalism and plurality of values.

The writings included into the second part, which can be read both as lecture notes and as a series of captivating essays, treat the wandering motifs of world literature in close connection with the problem of literary canon(s). The presentation of the classics of world literature does not follow a chronological order, but rather the logic of recurrence of different themes and motifs, the intertextual relations, in this way ancient and postmodern texts and authors are juxtaposed. The thorough examination of the Tristram legend, the story of Jonah, the utopia, the labyrinth, the various patterns of novels provide an opportunity for the author to compare the literary works belonging to different ages and to different

nations, to follow the fate and the route of the wandering motifs across time and space. In this approach, world literature is not just a heap of books gathering dust on the shelves, but rather a living material; the precondition of becoming a classic, of forming part of the literary canon is the survival into the texts of later periods, at the level of themes and motifs, overt quotations or covert allusions.

The relationship between cult and literature/literary policy is analyzed in three studies comprised in the final chapter. As it is well illustrated by the cult of Ady or by the homage paid to the mythical figure of Sándor Kőrösi Csoma in Transylvanian literature, the questions of cult and canon are interwoven with the Transylvanist literary tradition. “Canon and cult are related terms in many respects. Both play a crucial role in forming and preserving the identity of a community. Both carry out the act of preservation by covering up the literary works: they construct the past, regarded as a pattern, from the perspective of the present, with the purpose of legitimation”—Zsuzsa Tapodi writes.

The recurring question of literary canons makes the approach of the present volume consistent and shapes the interpretive method of the particular texts. The expression of the “book which never gets lost” alludes not only to intertextuality as the basic form of existence of literature, but also to the transmission of values, to the survival of cultural tradition. At the same time, it expresses the author’s belief in the sustainability and communicability of culture.

The studies of the present volume give proof of this conviction.

Horváth István and Tódor Erika Mária (eds.). *An evaluation of the policy of producing bilingualism. Studies elaborated on the basis of presentations during the conference held in Miercurea-Ciuc between 12-13 June 2008.* Cluj-Napoca: The Romanian Institute for Research on National Minority, 2008. 309 pp.

Enikő Pál

”There is an old truth that those who know more than one language, know better their own mother tongue,” said Zoltán Kodály. In my opinion that could be the leading idea of this volume of studies, since bilingualism represents its main concern.

The volume consists of 25 studies divided into 4 chapters, all of which deal with different aspects of bilingualism and its effects on people living in regions that are heterogeneous in many respects: language use, culture, ethnic identity or

political status. The authors of the studies, belonging to different nationalities and having different mother tongues (Romanian, Hungarian, and English), are experts of this topic, academics, specialists, teachers and PhD students, fact that gives credit to the analyses presented. Thus, the volume offers various perspectives and explanations of the same phenomena. Moreover, there is a selected bibliography at the end of each study to provide the readers interested in that specific subject the possibility of further investigation.

The intended audience, as the editors themselves affirm, is made up of researchers, specialists, teachers preoccupied with the problem of institutional bi(multi)lingualism. In this respect, the volume is appropriate to its audience, for it offers a realistic view of the status of the majority's (state's) language in the context of the minority, including, at the same time, several practical ideas regarding the teaching of the majority's language that I consider really useful in my work as a teacher. In addition, the volume may be interesting for the general public as well, those readers who are not initiated in this topic or have no scientific background but live in specific bilingual contexts able to appreciate cultural diversity and to exert tolerance.

The studies are mainly analytical, their development being orderly and logical. They focus on bi(multi)lingualism and on the correlation of the majority language to that of the minority's in different regions, such as the status of Hungarian in Slovakia, or Romani and Hungarian in Romania, the latter one being the main preoccupation. The theoretical background for these discussions is given by contrastive linguistics (theories of transfer and interference), sociolinguistics (bilingualism and linguistic socialization), psycholinguistics (cognitive models of language acquisition, motivation) and pedagogy (methods and strategies of foreign language teaching). Many of the studies are empirical, based on research (questionnaire) or personal experience, the obtained results, achievements being presented here, as well as the linguistic corpus itself (language examples, schemes, answers of people questioned or from the forum), also including data and numeric data, all of which have documentary value.

Although the majority of the studies focus on language itself as a means of communication and a reflection of ethnic and cultural identity, there are also political aspects involved, such as the rights of minorities in Romania in general, and those of the Hungarians in Transylvania in particular, as well as possibilities of improving of the legislative frame. The volume also offers an insight into bilingual education in different countries, such as in the USA, Canada (the status of French), Catalonia, as well as into the status of "small languages" in the EU, not only from a scientific point of view, but also, in one of the studies, from an *outsider's* perspective—as a teacher and parent who does not feel the historical weight of the

languages discussed—thus initiating new grounds of debate for the definition of the term bilingualism itself. The culture of interethnic dialogue in general, and the case of the Szekelys in particular, is also discussed in one of the studies dealing with the relation between ethnic/political and lexical (linguistic) identity.

One of the purposes of these scientific discussions, as the editors affirm, has been to initiate a search for a common semantic repertoire. The premises for the studies dealing with the acquisition of Romanian in schools where the language of teaching is that of the minority (Hungarian) are provided by the weak performance of pupils studying in these schools in the subject of Romanian language and literature. As well-based empirical analysis and scientific arguments are missing from political and public discussions related to this phenomenon, the volume proposed to fill this gap. Although aspects of bi- and multilingualism are widely discussed in contemporary literature, the issue of institutional bilingualism in the context of school structures of the Romanian educational system represents a matter of the hour a theme less dealt with on the level of scientific discourses. And this represents precisely the volume's novelty and originality. The studies follow diagnostic and prognostic purposes as well, trying to gather the results of existing research in order to find the domains that show a deficit. The aspects of the policy of producing bilingualism discussed in this volume have a tendency to lead us to reform the process of language acquisition. At the same time, readers would acknowledge the necessity of reconsidering the methods and strategies as well as the curriculum itself of Romanian. In this respect the questionnaire-based statistics referring to the linguistic and non-linguistic consequences of present-day Romanian language acquisition policy may be convincing, such as interethnic tension and attitudes of repulsion or hostility.

Another purpose of the volume has been to establish a proper terminology. Thus the new term proposed in this volume, which introduces a new concept of the state's language as well, is that of Romanian as a *non-native* language. This might create a conflict in this specific socio-political context (Hungarian minority in Romania) or confusion and reticence as it might be considered as an offense to the state's language and to its status. However, I think that the term itself is neutral of any kind of political content, which is the volume's standing-point as well, for it is the result of the selection from other terms, such as *foreign language* or *second language*. These two might create indignation of the political power, whereas Romanian as a *non-native* language in Romania does not, reflecting only a socio-linguistic reality. The socio-political implications of this kind of view on educational policy and multicultural dialogue are still implicitly present.

The main topic of the volume, the policy of producing bilingualism, is one of present international interest as the year 2008 has been the European year of intercultural dialogue. It deals with the present state of socio-psycho-educational reality. There are solutions proposed to the deficits presented, solutions that—in

my opinion—are far from being recognized or accepted by common consent and also far from implementation. This could be considered a weakness of the volume, although it has not proposed for a moment to implement those solutions. It also does not impose attitudes to adopt, but urges us to think about them, to look for possible interaction, and once the problem acknowledged, the way to accomplishment opens up.

Last but not least, I would recommend the volume for those interested in bi(multilingualism) and its implications. One could find it challenging to face facts that might have been known but not acknowledged and it could help all of us, in particular language teachers and people living in mixed communities, to consider linguistic, cultural or ethnic differences on other grounds.

Pap, Levente and Tapodi Zsuzsa (eds.). *Közösség, kultúra, identitás.* [Community, Culture, Identity.] Kolozsvár: Scientia, 2008.

Árpád Kémenes

Community, Culture, Identity is a selection of essays presented at two conferences organized by the Department of Humanities at the Csíkszereda campus of Sapientia University. The first conference was held on the topic of cult, culture, and identity in collaboration with the Institute of Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy and the Petőfi Museum of Literature in September 2003. The second conference, the title of which was *Community and Outsiders*, was organized in September 2005. It can be regarded as the outcome of the cooperation between the Department of Humanities and the Alexander Csoma de Kőrös Centre for Oriental Studies.

Having in view the partial overlapping between the topics the essays presented in the two conferences focus on, the editors organized the sequence of the 29 writings according to the main theme investigated in each paper.

The first essays provide an insight into the way foreigners and people belonging to other cultures, religions or ranks of society were regarded during the ancient times, the Middle Ages and modern history. The writings entitled “*Pen-pusher, cunning trader and, what is more, and Egyptian*” by László Horváth and “*A Citizen, a Stranger and a Prostitute: the Question of “We and They” in an*

Athenian Speech by György Némethy reveal that the citizens of the ancient Athens were reluctant and even forbidden to mingle with foreigners. The tendency of keeping distance from the “others” can also be traced in the Roman Empire. Tertullian’s *Adversus Iudaeos* (presented by Levente Pap) is a telling example of this issue. However, written documents also provide evidence of attempts at opening towards other cultures. In the essay entitled *Possibilities of Social Mobility in the Rome of the 3rd Century A. D.* Péter Forisek presents the biographical data of a wealthy Roman nobleman of African origin, who led the typical life of knights, while in *The Limes of the Danube and the Carpathian Basin* Tamás Gesztelyi relates about the strategic alliances the Roman Empire concluded with its neighboring peoples living along the Danubian limes of the empire. The necessity of the acceptance of otherness was understood by several outstanding figures of the Middle Ages and modern history, as well. The idea appears in the *Admonitions* of the Hungarian King Saint Stephen, which is interpreted in this volume by László Havas. In the essay entitled *Syncretism and Language Policy in the Mogul Empire*, Imre Bangha emphasizes the beneficial influence of cultural tolerance promoted by the Mogul emperors to the development of mixed language poetry in North India.

Cult is also approached from a varied perspective in the volume. Lajos Balázs’s writing presents the cult of children as it appears in folk-culture. Gábor Gyáni investigates political cult and the cult of the leader from a social point of view. He targets problems such as the proper sociopsychological background (which is indispensable for the development of political cults), or the factors that contribute to keeping alive the myth of the leader.

Several essays describe different aspects and manifestations of literary cults. Orsolya Rákai provides a theoretical approach towards the topic. Basing mostly on Paul Ricoeur’s *Du texte à l’action. Essais de l’hernéutique II*. (Paris: Seuil, 1986.), the author puts forward her point of view on questions such as the meaning of “otherness” and “sameness” in a collective identity generated by a cult, the way these concepts are connected, and how fiction blends with reality in cults. The cult of canonized figures of Hungarian literature is focused on by Béla Pomogáts, and Zsuzsa Tapodi. Pomogáts writes about the cult formed around Sándor Reményik, while Zsuzsa Tapodi investigates the influence of Endre Ady’s cult on the Hungarian literature from Transylvania at the beginning of the 20th century. György Tverdota approaches Ady’s literary heritage from a different point of view. He provides interesting data on the way the cult formed around the leaders of the 1703-1711 Hungarian war for independence and the poems that were assumed to have been created in that period influenced Ady’s poetry. The author points out that these poems, which served as sources of inspiration for Endre Ady, were in fact fakes written by Kálmán Thaly in the 19th century in order to strengthen the cult of the independence war.

The last essays in the volume are dedicated to problems concerning identity. *Gender, identity and (film)narrative* by Judit Pieldner focuses on the way subversion of social and cultural identity based on binary oppositions between the two sexes appears in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and in its 1992 film-adaptation written and directed by Sally Potter. Éva Bányai explores different possibilities of interpretation offered by the relationship between characters, their names and identity in Ádám Bodor's novels.

The short outlines of the essays presented above highlight on an interdisciplinary approach towards cult, identity, and culture, as a result of which the present volume can be useful not only for readers interested in literature, but also for historians, anthropologists, sociologists—practically for everyone who is interested in the various aspects of the topics investigated in the volume.