

**Thesis of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation**

**Mária Jaskóné Gácsi**

*The stylist voice of János Komáromi and the possibility of the novel-form*

**Thesis of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation**

**Supervisor: Prof. emer. dr. Lajos Sipos CSc**

PPKE BTK

Doctoral School of Literary Studies

**Head of doctoral school: Prof. dr. László Nagy DSc**

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## I. The topic and tasks of the research

János Komáromi was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> December in 1890 in Málca. He studied at the lyceum of Sárospatak between 1902 and 1910 where he gained appreciation and honor among his teachers and fellow students. The first milestone in his authorship was considered to start when his article was published in “Szövétnek” in the school-year of 1907/06. Following the first successful publications, “Komár” – his pseudonym meaning “mosquito” in Slovakian – changed his name to János Komáromi with the 11367/1908 permission of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He became a member, then the scrivener, and finally the junior president of the Lyceum of Sárospatak Transylvania Self-developing Course and Lyceum Shorthand-Writer Group. In 1910 he completed the maturity exam successfully and travelled to Pest to study law. Being a jurist was only an excuse, he never finished law school, wanted to become a journalist. He was in his second year when he visited Jenő Rákosi, the editor in chief of the paper called “Budapesti Hírlap”. He started his career as an author in 1911 at “Budapesti Hírlap”. He served at the kaiserjäger regiment from 1912 in Bozen for a year. At the dawn of the war the Tirol legion was called on duty, and Komáromi joined the fight as well. He was badly injured at Maskow, not far from Krakow, and was not able to take part in the war anymore. After his recovery he was chosen to be a Hungarian lecturer at the press department of the Ministry of War in Wien.

His first work, “*The departure of Koczák*” was published in 1914 in “Budapesti Hírlap”. Shortly he was said to be one of the most popular novelist. He became the member of the editor group of “Új Nemzedék”. After he left “Új Nemzedék”, he joined “Magyarság” – which was created in 1920 – and stayed there in his whole life. His articles started to draw the readers’ attention. His works were published even in “Napkelet”, edited by Cécile Tormay. He worked with great belief and diligence. The real fame was earned by “*Why are you sad bakerman?*” (1915), after which he started to write his novels and short stories without any break: “*András Csanak in Wien*”(1916), “*Tilinkó*” (1917), “*Summer has passed*”(1919), “*The Round-Up*” (1928) and “*Ragged Guards*”. He joined the Petőfi Association in 1921 and was also asked to fulfill the caretaker obligations of the Petőfi

House – so he moved in there in Bajza street in December 1922. This period was calm and quiet, he was able to write piece after the other: “*Silver firs in the wind*,” “*Tamás Esze, the colonel of the barefooted*,” “*The old lover*”, “*Rustling of pines*”, “*Vidróczky*”, “*Hé kozaken!*”, “*Students of Patak*”, “*The foreign girl*”. “*Rustling of pines*” was published as “*Teri*” in Wien. “*Hé Kosaken*” was also published, in more than twenty thousand copies. His works were translated to English, German and Polish as well.

The works of Komáromi János were presented in “Új Idők”, “Napkelet”, “Magyarság” and “Budapesti Hírlap”. Several daily papers featured his novels in episodes: “*Stem-student*” in “*Déli Hírlap*” of Timisoara, “*Summer is gone*” in the “*Erdélyi Helikon*”. For the twenty-fifth anniversary of his authorship, special editions were issued of his already published writings.

## II. Approach and method

From the 1980s a growing demand emerged for light and well-written literature. As a feature of this tendency, new works of Ferenc Herczeg, Lajos Zilahy, Miklós Surányi, Cécile Tormay, Lola Kosáryné Réz, Margit Bozzay és Irén P. Gulácsy were born. The public interest turned towards the popular writer of the Interbellum, the member of – the paper created as a counterpart of “Nyugat” – “Napkelet”, the author of “*Emperal and Royal nice days*” – which was on the top of the best seller lists –, János Komáromi. There were other facilitators of his emerging central position; the growing interest towards the interwar literature and the curiosity towards social-political events of the era. The most important factor, however, was the spread of the “mass literature”, the light fiction, not only in Hungary, but in other countries as well.

All these still do not provide the real reason of dealing with the work of János Komáromi. The main motivation was the intention of getting to know the era the most and also the literature embracing the elite culture. The real reason is the demonstration of how different genres appeared in this cultural atmosphere, and what was kept from the European and Hungarian traditions of historical and social novels. The presentation of the Hungarian cultural superiority and the traditional, heroic and nationalist moral values were expected from the first novel-group, while the second one was hoped to deal with the victory of the “good” that resolves social conflicts which had been already depicted in the works of the above mentioned authors. All these components could be found in the writings of Komáromi, this served as a base of his popularity, moreover, his style also represents the main values of the genre. The canonization of Komáromi’s writings was defined by the reviews made in this theoretical area.

### III. Conclusion

The dissertation summarizes the changes regarding novel-poetics in post-modernism and presents the novel-typological forms appearing in the oeuvre of János Komáromi. In the next chapters it interprets the characteristics of the historical novel, the relation of fiction and “reality-referentiality”, and the presence of the typical ideology of the era in “*Tamás Esze, the colonel of the barefooted*”.

Komáromi often used the technique of detailed description. Besides the bloody fights and movements of peasant life, the topic of fictitious love also gains importance. The story of the events and the narrations are created in such communicational situations where the internal changes of the characters become recognizable from the dialogues. The readers’ reaction is understandable, the chain of events is refreshing and overwhelming. No special individuum is given by the typical discourses of the characters: the historical effect, the anecdotic humour and the writer’s imagination is expressed in romantic exaggerations. “The art of description in Komáromi’s novels is always more powerful than what he told us about the world, life of his heroes. His touching sentimentality, reminding voice and virtuoso, heated *Hungarianism* could prevail in the recollection of the past” (SCHÖPFLIN Aladár, *A magyar irodalom a XX. Században [Hungarian Literature in the XX century]*, Bp., Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1990, 363.). His eventful, adventurous storytelling never lacks the accurate observation of reality and the exhaustive manner of presentation. He thoroughly analyzes the usual and special attributes of his heroes and intentionally directs the statement of facts towards natural representation through taking hold of emotions. The first level of meaning is extended with personifications and simple metaphors. The narration and discourses in the story description however do not create the illusions of recovering the big truths of life – as we see it in the writings of Móricz, Dezső Szabó or Margit Kaffka. According to Aladár Schöpflin Komáromi lived in the past, he did not react to the developments of his own

era. He did not try to understand the present or the true and real alternatives of that time. He just intended to be a popular, well-known writer.

Komáromi has established fictional space and time with the help of autobiographical elements in his novel *“Students of Patak”*. He considered his passed life more of „raw material” than a starting point. The work, from the point of view that it is placed in the Upper-Tisza region, in the embrace of the mountains of Zemplén, is location bound. As described by Sándor Márai in his work *“The Writers of the Highlands”*, he is a stubborn and fierce patriot. „He is drawn back to his birthplace, to the scene of his childhood by curiosity, worry and the urge of reminiscion.” (MÁRAI Sándor, *A felvidék írói* [The Writers of the Highlands] , Kisfaludy Társaság Évlapjai. Új Folyam. 60. kötet. 254-257.) The fictional time is approximately the same as the first part of his life, and is characterized by retrospective and synchronic narration.

For the interpretation I have used the manuscript of the novel. From this the writer’s creative method can be reconstructed. The attached partial manuscript and the synoptic version of some pages gives the reader a glance of the process of creation. The letters exchanged between Komáromi and his former teacher, István Harsányi also provides useful information. The pertinent parts of the manuscript legacy are published for the first time.

In the first part of 20th century, the main object of the Hungarian novel was „the recording of the knowledge of the world in a unified frame”. László Németh, Zsigmond Móricz and Sándor Márai believed in this opportunity. (OLASZ Sándor, *A regény metamorfózisa a 20. század regényirodalmában*[Novel metamorphosis in the XX century novel literature], Bp., Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1997, 8.) First off, Komáromi’s intention was „recording”, and also – in his historical novel – he used elements of the epic, the archetype of the genre. This text structure shows some special traits also; it differs from this type of the visualization of these traits. (Vö. BAHTYIN Mihail, *Az eposz és a regény. A regény kutatásának metodológiájáról* [The epic and the novel. About the methodology of novel research], *Literatura*, 1995. 4. sz. 331., 334-335). Komáromi’s works – according to Viktor Žmegač’s conceptual system – are leaning towards globality.

János Komáromi's two novels in focus „simulate real value relations” and „this era brings the development of a relatively big number of reading public”. (IMRE László, Műfajok létformája [Forms of genres], Debrecen, Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 1996, 38.)

## **Publications in the relevant topic:**

„... *Élni fogtok, mindig élni, pataki diákok, amíg merész dalaitok élnek!*” (“...You will live, always live, students of Patak, until your virtuous songs are sung!”) János Komáromi: short analysis of the novel “Students of Patak”, Széphalom 19. Yearbook of Ferenc Kazinczy Association, Sátoraljaújhely, 2009. 470-475.

*A kamaszkor válságainak tükröződése a XX. század egyik írójának tollából. Gondolatok Komáromi János írói világáról.* (Reflections of the crisis of teenage years from the pen of a XX century writer. Thoughts about the stylist world of János Komáromi) Péter Pázmány Catholic University János Vitéz Faculty, „Innováció és felsőoktatás” (Innovation and higher education) scientific conference booklet ISBN: 978-963-7291-27-2, Esztergom, 2009. 89-96.

*Valóban sovinizta, irredenta volt a „zempléni tárogató?”* (Was the tárogató of Zemplén really chauvinist and irredenta?) János Selye University II. International Conference essay booklet ISBN 978-80-8122-008-1, 2010. 526-538.

*The folklore world of János Komáromi.* AGRIA, 2011/2. 215-222.