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*The literary and social philosophical background  
of Sándor Márai's image of Jesus*

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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## BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH AND PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

The publication of the series entitled *The Complete Diary*, based on the manuscripts of Sándor Márai, was completed in 2018. These volumes provide a number of previously unknown additions to the analysis of his oeuvre, especially to his works written during his years in exile. Behind every line written by the author was an attempt at self-canonization, which the dissertation also tries to support with evidence along the theory of autobiography as a personality-shaping act.

The figures in Márai's late works have similar characteristics to this image: the crucified body of Jesus, which sets the stage for the dialogues in the radio drama, titled *Keresztkérdés*, still asks, while in the processing of Giordano Bruno's execution, in the *Erősítő* only the indifferent face of Jesus stares at the reader, and in *Harminc ezüstpénz* the actually emerging image of Jesus is separated from the crowd. The common theme in these works is that they are about people who have been able to influence the process of history. Relying on the sources explored and to be explored in the context of the three works, the research attempts to identify the most important attitudes that, according to Márai, characterize a person (mostly with artistic vein) who can be different and be able to criticize his society by his own existence.

Sándor Márai's opinion on transcendent and theology is not uniform for his entire career. The writer's oeuvre is more deeply rooted in a particular conception of Christianity than the other two adjectives affixed to the writer: "bourgeois" and "emigrant," because these two derive from Christianity, the code of ethics of the European socialization. The first part of the dissertation analyses chronologically the writer's opinions which are in the complete diaries concerning the Catholic religion.

The research is based on history of ontology in that it focuses on Márai's opinion on the social-shaping effect of ideologies. The aim on the other hand is to explore philosophical-historical-social historical-literary works and researches that played a role in the development of Márai's thinking and influenced the workflow of the three literary works with philological-textological research methods. Furthermore, to find the authors and the influencing factors (readings) belonging to the listed types, which perhaps even the author himself did not know (recognize), but their content could be felt in the mood of the age. Based on this source research, the dissertation intends to make the ontological-historical background of the figure(s) of Jesus depicted in the works.

During the examination of the texts in the Márai legacy, the aim was to further think about the results of the already published studies on the works, which can be said to be complete in relation to the research possibilities assumed at the time of the arrival of the manuscripts to Hungary. However, after the publication of all known (published) manuscripts of the diaries, and taking into account the writer's correspondence with publishers, these research results can be supplemented with new, hitherto unknown or silenced significant additions that can even modify the author's image mostly based on his works in the 1930's and a national consciousness-building literary policy.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Researching the background of the image of Jesus requires an interdisciplinary approach. This seems to be supported by the fact that the author did not deal only with literature either: his subject in each case was man and his behavior. The reason for the application of cultural-historical contextual narratology as a method of literary theory that does not only monitor the aesthetic value or canonical status of works is the content structure of diaries: it is difficult to say a field of science that has not been the focus of Márai's interest. Instead of examining the published texts on their own, the dissertation was prepared taking into account their textual versions and manuscripts documenting the author's work process, as well as the circumstances of the works, such as the publishers' work and, most importantly, Márai's consciously formed legacy.

Using the discourse analysis helps to understand the polyphonic dialogue passages between Matthew and Judas, Annas, and Judas that are no longer read in the final text version of the *Harminc ezüstpénz*, but which remain in the manuscript and allow for many interpretations. Intertextual analysis can shed light on how log topics appear in a workflow that causes a change (rewrite) between two consecutive text versions. The parts omitted from the edition are not primarily significant aesthetically, but rather relevant to the exploration and possible modification of the image of Jesus. The method of discourse analysis is similarly applicable to drama, in which some actors share their experiences on the same subject. The *Keresztkérdés* can be seen as a literary processing of language terms highlighted from medical, political, and working class discourses. In the case of *Erősítő*, the evening conversations of the monks, which also reflect the themes of papal encyclicals, and the dialogue between Cardinal Bellarmino and

Giordano Bruno on theology and social sciences, but no less important the semantic aspects of Bruno's last night's dungeon scene.

The interpretation of the manuscripts allows for a closer look at the work of the writer, that is the genesis of the works. Sharing the views of the school of textual genetics, the dissertation does not attribute an exceptional status to the final (published) texts, mainly due to the fact that modelling the origin history to explore the image of Jesus required a vertical study (to reconstruct the logical steps of the writer's work). The text versions show, on the one hand, Márai's writing technique along the line of dragging and the rejection of Márai's voice, and on the other hand, the change in his opinion in the motive of betrayal. It should be emphasized, however, that the manuscripts clearly show that his views on Jesus and Jesus' work had already developed in the last years of the war and had not changed in substance. However, the manuscripts give a true picture of the publication of this opinion. With complementing the method of contextual narratology, the text critique examining manuscripts can help to explore and record an authentic author's image.

The approach to memory research was necessitated primarily by the analysis of the *Erősitő*. It is based on the research of the historical novel and the autobiographical novel, which is still based on the definitions of autobiography, so primarily the researches of Hyden White, Gábor Gyáni, Pierre Nora and Zoltán Z. Varga on the subject of fiction and truth.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The dissertation did not focus primarily on the analysis of the works, but rather provided interdisciplinary aspects and questions for the analysis of the works. The aim of the dissertation was to determine the attitudes of Márai's image of individuals, so what is needed for someone to be able to deviate from the most characteristic features of the social environment around her or him and as a result to be able to reflect on it through works of art. This does not necessarily mean criticism, but in all cases, coupled with the doubt necessary for the examination, it means questioning the status quo. An idealized example of this person is Jesus, in the eye of Márai an artist who had poetic endowments, was able to express himself in an artistic-level linguistic form. These personality traits belonged to him from birth like his physical qualities. It was not the social medium and upbringing that shaped him as a poet, but they all played a role in recognizing and harnessing his talent based on social sensitivity.

A further aim of the dissertation was to try to give a different interpretation of the late period of Márai's oeuvre from the point of view of the theory of existence and psychology. An examination of Márai's works and thoughts from the point of view of human existence and its relation to the transcendent yielded a more objective interpretation, which included and even absorbed the adjectives previously affixed to the writer. The dissertation does not dispute the role and iconic status of Márai in Hungarian civic culture between the two world wars, but rejects this authorial image in the case of the author's life period after 1948. That era is also usually referred to as the "emigrant" and thus narrowed down again; the dissertation agrees with the latter category in that the writer did not live in coercion in Hungary, and the effect of this can be observed in some of his late works. It is much more characteristic in the writer's late era the decline of Christian culture and the theme of betrayed European culture. These two are not linked by the social aspects of the situation of emigration, but by the influence of political power on Christian morality and the arts.

The preliminary suggestion of the dissertation that Márai's art should be separated from politics has not been successful in the sense that almost all of the author's late writings are saturated with world and religious politics. After all, this finding is not surprising, since in the communities of humanity imbued with the mass media of the twentieth century, it is hardly possible to speak of a social segment where the means of electronic communication would not have appeared. There are no self-sufficient communities – or very few and they are disappearing – that are able to detach themselves from the influence of economic and ideological power. An important result of the research and related to this world trend is that the characteristics of the author's views on social policy and history in the diaries of 1947–48 hardly changed in the following decades. Márai's image of Jesus' personality and activity from the mid-1940s has not changed, even when he shows him at different stages in his life.

A significant conclusion of the research is that Márai considered the social form of meritocracy appropriate for the salvation of the world. The dissertation also shows the author's didactic aspirations following the thinking of Aristotle and Plato, which were not broken by many experiences of failure. The statement of the dissertation is also supported by the judgment of Sándor Márai, according to which money-motivated economic and political power is the cause of betrayal against culture.

## PUBLICATION ACTIVITY ON THE SUBJECT

1. „Márai Sándor – Erősítő: Istenről való beszéd a második világháború után”. In *Nyomkövetés 2.: Tanulmánykötet*. Szerkesztette DOMOKOS Gyöngyi, KÁLI Anita, MAJOR Ágnes, SZABÓ P. Katalin, 9–22. Budapest, Magyarország – Újvidék, Szerbia: Vajdasági Magyar Doktoranduszok és Kutatók Szervezete, Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége, Irodalomtudományi Osztály, 2017.
2. „Márai Sándor – Erősítő: A keresztény hagyományhoz való viszony tükrében”. *Vigilia* 82, 6. sz. (2017): 448–456.
3. „Irónia Márai Sándor kései írásaiban”. In *Nyomkövetés 3.: Tanulmánykötet*. Szerkesztette BOLDOG-BERNÁD István, SZABÓ P. Katalin, SZUPERÁK Alexandra, 65–85. Szabadka – Budapest: Vajdasági Magyar Doktoranduszok és Kutatók Szervezete, Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége, Irodalomtudományi Osztály, 2018.
4. „Könyvek, mint a szellemi szabadság emlékhelyei: A fikció szerepe Márai Sándor Erősítő című regényében”. *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 122, 5. sz. (2018): 603–616.
5. „Márai Sándor: A teljes napló 1982–1989”. *Műhely Kulturális Folyóirat* 42, 2. sz. (2019): 76–78.
6. „Márai Sándor Alekszandr Szolzsenyicinről alkotott véleményének alakulástörténete”. *Ambroozia Irodalmi Folyóirat* 9, 1. sz. (2019).
7. „Márai Sándor narratív technikájának identitásképző szerepe”. *Irodalomtörténet* 101, 3. sz. (2020): 367–372.