

**Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation**

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**Theory and methodology in literary onomastics**

Proper names in István Szilágyi's novels  
(in particular in *Hollóidő /Time of ravens/*)

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## 1. Antecedents of the research, posing the problem

Proper names are important elements of human languages and may be connected to every field of human activity (history, culture, religion, arts, etc.). Naturally, names play significant roles in literary texts. Since in these texts reality and fiction mingle, the differences and similarities between the real world of the reader and the world of the text are important in the process of the reception. In this respect the name-giving role of the author becomes more important. In giving a name there is a significant distinction between applying a name and creating one as suggested by ARISTOTLE in Poetics (Chapter IX). Nevertheless, the systematic examination of proper names in literary works began much later at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, when onomastics became an independent discipline.

In Hungary these examinations were triggered by a study by MIKLÓS KOVALOVSKY published in 1934. The title of the study was: *Literary onomastics*, which became the name for this new discipline in our country. However, beside *literary name-giving* KOVALOVSKY introduced yet another term: *author's name-giving* in his study. Since then the terminology of the discipline has been ambiguous in several points:

- the names of the field of examination (*literary name-giving*, *author's name-giving*, *literary onomastics*);
- the term of the *literary name*:

- whether it refers to all proper names used by the author or only those where either the name or the bearer of the name is fictitious;
- whether proper names of literature that is in close connection with reality (documentary novels, literary reports, autobiographies, etc.) may be considered literary names;
- the term of *fictitious name*: whether the fictitiousness of the bearer of the name or only the fictitiousness of the name should be considered when using the term.

In relation to terminological problems yet another question arises: what aspects should be considered when classifying the proper names of literary texts? Typologies in the Hungarian literature usually follow the classifications used in other fields of onomastics or they are tailored along the structure and interpretation of the given literary texts. Naturally, terminological clarification, the placement of literary name types in the realistic-fictitious aspect system would also suggest an alternative way of classification. Besides, KOVALOVSKY also gives a typology according to the power of the names they have in characterization. Similar ideas may be found in German literature, yet they were not applied in the Hungarian studies.

In studies specialized in literary name-giving a frequently reoccurring analytical aspect is the functionality of proper names, that is: what literary proper names are for and what role they play in

literary texts. On the basis of analyses so far, such functional aspect system would be necessary that could be used as a universal starting point for studies, thus providing an opportunity to certain comparisons. Such system may be found in the German literature offering methodological considerations to the analyzer.

The meaning, or meaninglessness of proper names have been widely discussed. But what do the relevant studies of logic and linguistic philosophy say about proper names? What should be considered when studying the meaning of proper names?

## **2. Applied methodology**

The posed problems pertain to the theoretical and methodological questions of the studied field. In the clarification of the terminology and in the case of the methodological questions the applied method was obvious: I extended the results of the Hungarian literature with the results of international literature, especially with those that were not applied by our literature (eg. BIRUS 1978). While using certain literary texts I complemented these with my own thoughts and suggested solutions. My goal was to offer terms and a typological aspect system that could be used uniformly in further studies.

When examining the meaning of fictitious literary proper names, I studied the logical and linguistic philosophical works concentrating only on such proper names, striving to cover the most recent results of both Hungarian and foreign literature, too (SZABÓ, 2005; 2010, and DEBUS 2002; 2005).

In the case of theoretical-methodological results the question of practical applicability always arises. Therefore I had set myself the task in advance to use the results of my thesis in a separate analysis. For this analysis I chose the novels of István Szilágyi, especially *Hollóidő*, which was published in 2001.

### 3. New results

In my thesis I suggested the comprehensive use of the term *literary onomastics*. I find it necessary that the interdisciplinary state of the field of study indicated by this term should be asserted in further studies. Therefore I argued that the term *literary onomastics* should be used for the diverse study of the relation between literature and proper names. On the other hand, *literary name-giving* should be reserved for such cases when the core of the study is the literary text and its proper names. Thus I placed the field of literary name-giving within the field of literary onomastics.

In the question of fictitious-realistic opposition concerning fictional names I argued that one should stick to the two basic elements of name-giving: using a name and creating one. I agreed with SOBANSKI (2000) that when examining the proper names of fictional literary texts a distinction should be made whether the names are fictitious or real. In my opinion, however, there are no real name-bearers in fictional texts because their reality is merely quasi-reality (cf. INGARDEN 1977). I call these *quasi-realistic name-bearers*. I endeavoured to make the terms applicable for intertextual name-giving. I attempted to define the relevant terms and on the basis of these I set up a typology of fictional proper names that is based on the fictitious-realistic opposition.

In harmony with the attitude of literary criticism, I suggested the definition of the following terms:

- *literary (proper) name* (every proper name should be considered *literary (proper) name* that appears in a literary text);
- *fictional (literary proper) name* (literary (proper) names that appear in fictional literary texts are considered *fictional (literary) (proper) names*, while those appearing in non-fictional literary texts are considered *non-fictional (literary) (proper) names*)

I complemented KOVALOVSKY's typology with the groups of *personifying name* and *classifying name* from German literature. Although these terms may be found in the Hungarian literature as aspects, they are not part of the applied classification practices. When classifying the proper names of literary texts I suggested the use of such aspects that are not rooted in the proper name groups of the real world but are based on the relation between the (fictional) name and the (fictional) text.

I summarized and examined what could be said about literary proper names from the aspect of logic and linguistic philosophy and how the problem of fiction has recently appeared in connection with the question. I defined the meaning structure of literary proper names on the basis of KATALIN J. SOLTÉSZ (1979) and DEBUS (2002).

I demonstrated the most important roles of proper names in literary texts on the basis of a study (*Der namein der Erzählung*) by DIETER LAMPING, which was published in 1983 and is unknown in the Hungarian literature. These roles are: identification,

fictionalizing-illusionizing, accentuation, perspectivizing, aesthetizing and mythizing.

In order to use my theoretical-methodological suggestions in practice, on the basis of the results of my thesis I examined the novels of István Szilágyi, *Hollóidő* in particular. This examination may not be considered complete: I am sure that a later rereading of the novel will not only suggest a broader interpretation of the story but its proper names will offer the discovery of further aspects. Yet the most important fact was clear from the analysis so far: István Szilágyi's narrative technique that is based on the combination of fictitious and realistic elements greatly influences the use of proper names. As I see it, this is the reason why the proper names and their roles in *Hollóidő* principally pertain to the problems of identification.

#### 4. Publication activities

- TÓTH LÁSZLÓ 2010a. Valós és fiktív helynevek Szilágyi István Hollóidő című regényében. (Real and fictitious place names in István Szilágyi's *Raven Time*) In: HOFFMANN ISTVÁN–TÓTH VALÉRIA (ed.): *Helynévtörténeti tanulmányok 5*. Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen. 263–269.
- TÓTH LÁSZLÓ 2010b. Hangulat és sztereotípa Mikszáth névadásában. (Mood and stereotype in Mikszáth's name-giving) In: ALABÁN FERENC (ed.): *Az interkulturális kommunikáció Mikszáth Kálmán műveiben*. Hungarovox, Budapest. 152–158.
- TÓTH LÁSZLÓ 2015. Alapfogalmak az irodalmi onomasztikában. (Basic concepts in literary onomastics.) In: Emlékkönyv Bíró Ferenc 70. születésnapjára. (Szerkesztés és megjelenés alatt.)

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- SZABÓ ERZSÉBET 2010. A lehetséges világok elmélete a narratológiában. In: SZABÓ ERZSÉBET (ed.): *Új elméletek a narratológiában*. (= Studia Poetica. Supplementum III. lingua Hungarica editum) Jate Press, Szeged. 97–164.