Doctoral School of International Relations and Political Science

BOOK OF THESES

Miklós Bálint Tóth

ON THE BORDERLAND OF POLITICAL THEORY AND LITERATURE

Three Case Studies

Book of Theses

Supervisor: Balázs Zoltán DSc, PhD

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1. Background and justification of the research

1.1. Disciplinary framework

Despite the fact that we generally regard literature and political thought as two distinct and distinguishable spheres, the two areas as intertwined and inseparable halves of a whole form an integral part of European intellectual tradition. There are countless examples of canonical works in Western culture with special significance regarding both literature and political theory. This constellation has been present all along in the development of European culture: we could bring several examples from Sophocles' Antigone through Shakespeare's Hamlet to Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, all of them being equally interesting and relevant for the scholars of both literature and political theory.

However, the emergence of modern scientific approaches resulted in a crucial break between literature and political theory. By narrowing down the definition of knowledge, the Cartesian conception fundamentally redefined what is to be considered valuable and acceptable. As the modern notion of science has become exclusive, the intellectual importance of numerous areas – such as theology, arts and literature – has been devaluated significantly.

Needless to say, the contextual framework regarding human coexistence was also radically reformed by the Cartesian approach. As representatives of social sciences have been increasingly intent on copying the methods of natural sciences, specialization and empirical research projects have become the prevalent paradigm in social sciences – including political science. In his analysis of the characteristics of modern political science, Almond notes accurately that "*Perhaps the most important consequence of this imitation of hard science has been an emphasis on method as the primary criterion for judging the quality of research in political science.*" (Almond, 1977, p. 506)

While this modern scientific approach has undeniably yielded significant results, the difficulties of the adaptation of the Cartesian approach to humanities have gradually became obvious. The "rehumanisation" (Whitebrook, 1995, p. 55) of human and social sciences—which urged the redefinition of these areas—may also be traced back to this reflection, together with the rediscovery of certain areas incompatible with the science concept borne by the idea of Enlightenment and the growing acceptance of interdisciplinary approaches. The penetration of *Politics and Literature* as a sub-discipline of political science also fits into this trend. Obviously,

it would be misleading to consider this sub-discipline as an integral part of mainstream political science, but its academic legitimacy has undoubtedly increased.

Notwithstanding international tendencies, *Politics and Literature* is still one of the underrepresented areas in Hungarian political science. Considering the influence of literature on Hungarian political thought, this may be surprising. Indeed, the relevance of Kálmán Mikszáth's, Mihály Babits's or Sándor Márai's oeuvre regarding politics and political theory in itself would be enough to conclude Hungarian literary works may serve as an excellent field of research for political science.

1.2. Subject of the dissertation

The dissertation is based on the conviction that there are numerous works in Hungarian literature which, in their own particular way, are able to contribute significantly to the extension of the knowledge accumulated by modern political theory. Given that the specific perspective represented by poems and novels is particularly suitable for analysing the principles that determine the fundamental features of political communities, this dissertation focuses on the examination of problems related to political order in the broadest sense.

Although the political theoretical significance attributed to certain pieces of literature is certainly justifiable, we cannot avoid discussing in detail the complex relation between political and literary quality in the first chapter of this dissertation. This serves both theoretical and methodological purposes, as the dilemmas arising from the undeniable differences between political and literary approaches necessarily raise the question of whether the political aspects in the works of writers and poets can be interpreted from a political theoretical perspective at all, and if so, how to consider these.

After outlining the theoretical-methodological framework, the three case studies that form the central part of this dissertation are discussed. First I analyse the phenomenon of ideology, a regularly studied concept in political science, through Arthur Koestler's *Sötétség délben* (Darkness at Noon, 2019a). It is well known that the plot of the Budapest-born writer's internationally acclaimed novel is a reflection of the career of the author, but for political theorists, this novel is interesting for reasons other than its biographical relevance. Its value lies in the fact that, instead of phrasing an external critique of ideology like political science references usually do, the novel explains why ideological reasoning is indefensible using the inside perspective of that of the protagonist Rubashov, who has been a devoted follower and

distributor of the ideology for decades. It would be a mistake, however, to describe the story of Rubashov as a process of complete detachment from ideological thought: although the protagonist realises his intellectual disposition is in fact a dead end street, the appeal of the ideology itself is not significantly diminished for him, even though he criticises it extensively.

In the second case study, I examine Sándor Márai's short novel *Ítélet Canudosban* (Justice in Canudos, 2002). In analysing this piece of work, I seek to answer the question of what might lead to widespread social discontent with the existing political order, even to an extent of armed conflicts in some cases, in an era of peace, economic prosperity and cultural vitality. In other words, what may justify an unjustified rebellion? As in Koestler's novel, real historical aspects cannot be ignored, but also in this case the text has a political-theoretical message that goes beyond the actual historical context. The events of 1968 had a significant influence on Márai's attitude—and thus, indirectly, on his work. Nevertheless, the examination of the plot, set in Brazil at the end of the 19th century, allows us to discuss broader theoretical questions and leads to the realisation that both the need for order and the need for anarchy are in fact integral and inescapable elements of human nature.

In the next chapter, I analyse the concept of nostalgia from the aspect of political theory. Although there are many examples of this experience in cultural and political history, starting with Homer's Odyssey, scientific reviews on the subject are strikingly scarce. This is probably due to the notorious reluctance of modern political science to examine elusive and difficult-to-describe phenomena, including political attitudes. Therefore, in this section of the dissertation, I wish to show that, in political terms, nostalgic attitudes are much more complex than simply identifying them with a purposeless longing for a past. To prove my point, I will use another work by Márai, *Szindbád hazamegy* (Sindbad Returns Home, 2015), a novel that may also be seen as a paraphrase of Krúdy.

As reflected by the above, another logical path was used when selecting the political theory problems examined in this dissertation, in addition to the obvious thematic link. As you will see, the analysis consciously moves from the precisely defined notion of ideology to almost amorphous sensations represented by nostalgia and, accordingly, the objects of analysis are phenomena of different types of political reality.

Given that one of the stated aims of this dissertation is to demonstrate the theoretical value of literary works, in the conclusion I summarise the results of the application of the literary approach to political theory. I conclude my dissertation by discussing how the political

interpretation of literary texts may enrich mainstream political science knowledge by providing a rarely applied perspective.

2. Methodology

In the first part of the theoretical-methodological chapter, I present the tenets of New Criticism, because its claim regarding the autonomy of literature provides an excellent analogy for the specific study of political theory in literature. In particular, I highlight the importance of *Theory of Literature* (2002), an influential book by René Wellek and Austin Warren, whose idea on the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic approaches to literature serves as an analogy for grounding the examination of works of fiction from the aspect of political theory.

In the second subsection, I discuss the potential interpretations of the relationship between politics and literature. Relying on the previous sections, I distinguish the extrinsic and intrinsic interpretations and, in the light of these, I introduce the principles of an approach that allows for the interpretation of literary works from the sole aspect of political theory.

2.1. Principles of New Criticism

Often identified as a meta-practice rather than a systematic literary theory (Bókay, 2006, p. 127), the intellectual roots of New Criticism can be traced back to the work of Ivor Armstrong Richards. Refusing the prevalent continental approach focusing on intellectual history and authorial biographies, the Cambridge professor asked his students to try to interpret selected works of fiction without knowing the author or the period. (Bókay, 2006, p. 115) This approach, first used for the purposes of education, was later elaborated in his theoretical works (Richards, 2001; 2004). Richards' views on literature are expressed in his oft-cited idea *"It is never what a poem says that matters, but what it is."* (Richards, quoted in Bókay, 2006, p. 117)

Taking Richards' principles as a starting point, the proponents of New Criticism created a theoretical framework for reading literary works where the work of fiction is considered as an autonomous entity. They also claimed the literary critic's task to be the analysis of the objectively existing literary work strictly on the basis of the text. The underlying principle is the denial of subjectivity, often associated with fiction. Eliot's oft-quoted thought is a reference to this: *"Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."* (Eliot, 1998, p. 335)

The focus of this approach is to liberate literary interpretation from long-standing misconceptions, emphasising at the same time the specificity of literary texts. Mention should

be made here of two influential essays by Wimsatt and Beardsley. In *The Intentional Fallacy* (1946) and *The Affective Fallacy* (1949), they set out the foundations of a theoretical interpretive framework capable of setting aside the misunderstandings that arose from the approach that had long dominated the practice of literary analysis. Although they rely on different notions, the consequence of the two misconceptions is the same: *"the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear."* (Wimsatt - Beardsley, 1949, p. 31)

Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* (2002) relies heavily on the concept of New Criticism regarding the autonomy of literary creation. Starting from this premise, its main result is to systematically criticise those literary approaches which, though advertised as being able to capture the essence of literary works, in fact focus on an analytical aspect that has little to do with the purpose of their inquiry.

The authors identify five approaches to studying literature which they consider erroneous. These are the ones based on biography, psychology, social milieu, ideas and other arts. Their common feature is they interpret a given literary text by introducing an extrinsic factor. According to Wellek and Warren, however, these approaches necessarily result in misinterpretations, since they focus on factors extrinsic to the literary text rather than on its intrinsic elements. After defining the inappropriate ways of reading, they discuss the aspects which, in their view, bring researchers closer to understanding the work in question. These include, among other things, the study of metre, style or even literary history.

2.2. Extrinsic and intrinsic analysis of the role of politics in works of literature

Recognising the specific character of works of fiction does not exclude the possibility of examining other characteristics of the text, since it is possible that the analysed writing may have notable motifs—including political ones—that go beyond the boundaries of literature. The study of the ideas of New Criticism is essential because the reflections on the specificities of literary texts considered as autonomous entities and the definition of adequate criteria of analysis eventually lead to the conscious separation of the fiction-specific approach from other types of investigation. The distinction of different analytical focuses logically results in the realisation that apparently rivalling research aspects may all be relevant in the case of a particular work, i.e. it cannot be excluded that the text you are trying to interpret has significant literary, political and other messages at the same time.

By analogy with Wellek and Warren, we can thus distinguish between extrinsic and intrinsic approaches to the political content in works of fiction. These authors, assuming a kind of causal relation, derive the political motifs of the text from some external point of reference.

Among these, the first one to be discussed is the illustrative concept, an approach most often used in education. According to the concept, it is useful to explain the world of politics relying on works of fiction, because the often boring subject matter may be conveyed more efficiently this way. This is particularly true when the phenomena of foreign cultures are explained to students. (Zuckert, 1995: 189.) The weakness of this approach is its lack of the necessary theoretical background: although its proponents recognise the usefulness of fiction in this respect, they fail to address the question of why to consider the political elements hidden in novels or poems at all. (Whitebrook, 1995, p. 57)

The second concept to be addressed is the biographical approach (e.g. Bluefarb, 2011; Ingle, 2003). It is popular, as the author's life is a tangible and plausible point of reference when interpreting the political aspects of his/her works. One approach within this concept is assuming a link between the authors' origins and the political content of their writings. An excellent example of this approach is the claim that Thomas Mann or Sándor Márai have civic existence as a central theme of their novels due to their family backgrounds. The major shortcoming of the biographical approach is ignoring the fact that the worldview of authors and that of their fictional characters do not necessarily coincide. The two should be clearly distinguished not only in the case of purely fictional works, but also those containing apparent biographical elements.

Perhaps the most widely used approach discussing the relationship between politics and literature is based on the premise that the study of certain works of fiction can provide insights into the broad political reality at the time of their creation. Proponents of this approach argue that certain literary texts may be used as legitimate elements of the methodological practice of researchers seeking relevant sources for exploring the particular dynamics of social reality.

There are three types of concepts that focus on the social aspects of creation. The first concept is known as the historical approach; this one is strongly influenced by the contextualist school of Quentin Skinner (1969; 2002) (e.g. Schmitt, 2006; Higgins, 2004). The second one is the sociological approach, which seeks to understand the specificities of social existence and structures through literature (e.g. Wa Thiong'o, 1981; Kendall, 2008; Geréb, 1959). The third one, to be discussed in detail in my dissertation, is the critical approach which, in addition to

academic ambitions, also aims at being the initiator of social changes (e.g. Ingle, 1979; Butler, 2000; Irigaray, 2010). Although it is plausible to assume that the content of literary works is not independent of their broad political-economic environment, works suggesting strictly causal relations simplify the relationship between politics and fiction. Accordingly, it is essential to make readers aware that it is misleading to regard poems and novels as objective representations of the prevailing social environment.

Having analysed the ideas attributing political motifs in fiction to external factors, I look into the intrinsic approaches. The first political philosophical approach to be discussed (e.g. Scanlan, 2002; Craig, 2003; Stewart, 2016) is based on the belief that some works of fiction address the most profound problems of human existence at such depth that they even have a scientific relevance. Despite the fact that this approach is essentially justified, one is forced to acknowledge that literary texts are rarely able to meet the consistency requirements of philosophical thought. Because of its exclusivity, this approach does not help us to accurately unravel the complexity of human coexistence in the vast majority of works with an autonomous political message.

A possible solution to the above-mentioned shortcomings of the political philosophical concept is to apply the perspective of political theory, as this sub-discipline, focusing on the study of specific political attitudes, provides a sound theoretical background for the analysis of autonomous political life. The fact that political theory, even in an age of intellectual specialisation, is strongly linked to the approach used by humanities plays a major role in this. (Dryzek-Honig-Phillips 2006, p. 4) In addition, the abstract character and empirical orientation of political theory represent other advantages of this approach, as they render it suitable for the interpretation of concrete political problems expressed in literary works.

As opposed to the political philosophy approach, this concept uses another logical criterion instead of consistency. The preference for coherence over non-contradiction is more compatible with literary thought. As Zwicker notes, *"who could blame [playwrights, poets or novelists] for failures of analytic rigour or argumentative transparency as they make their specialized, interested, often polemical, at times uncertain, ironic, and rarely even-handed interventions into political systems – that is of course not their job."* (Zwicker, 2006, p. 145) Accepting this notion allows us to focus on the essential elements of the political thought process contained in the literary work without forgetting about argumentative inaccuracies.

In addition to the requirement of coherence, there is another aspect that must be taken into account when interpreting fiction from the perspective of political theory: the constant focus on plausibility, used as a filter, helps political scientists to reconsider the conclusions to be drawn from the examined text in the light of the political processes that are actually experienced in reality, and thus to exclude elements of fiction not compatible with the demands of the scientific approach.

These considerations also characterise the relevant scientific papers. A specific feature of these sources is that they do not aim at creating systematic and comprehensive theories, but rather the thorough examination of a specific political concept in relation to a particular work. Accordingly, the genre is dominated by case studies and collections of essays rather than monographs.

The above ideas are echoed, for example, in the analysis of *The Castle* by Franz Kafka (Balázs, 2015) or *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad (Spegele, 1972), but also in *The 'Invisible Hand' and the British Fiction, 1818-1860* (Courtemanche, 2011), which, by selecting works from a particular period, has a specific contextualist character. The analyses of utopian works (e.g. Sargisson, 2003; Burns, 2008; Pintér, 2017; Remport, 2017) form a particular subcategory, which is not surprising, given the influence of utopias on universal political thought. It is also worth highlighting the interest of political science in science fiction, also traceable in Hungarian scientific sources (e.g. Tóth, 2017; Tóth, 2018; Filippov-Nagy-Tóth, 2019).

3. Results of the dissertation

To summarise the main conclusions of the dissertation, I first discuss the findings of the three case studies and then briefly summarise the benefits of applying a literary perspective to political theory.

3.1. The anatomy of ideology

The analysis of Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* provides an insight into the nature of ideological reasoning from a rarely explored perspective. The story of the protagonist Rubashov who served the regime as a top leader for many decades only to be tried and eventually executed, illustrates the most important characteristics of ideology as a specific intellectual position, not by phrasing a critique from the outside as most often done, but explaining it from the aspect of an insider. I analyse ideology in relation to other politically relevant concepts such as religion, politics and morality so that the most important features of Koestler's concept of ideology may be understood. In the sections below, I summarise the main findings of the sub-chapters based around these three concepts.

An essential feature of ideology is illustrated by the parallels between ideology and religion (e.g. Voegelin, 2011, p. 28). The most notable among these is the comparison of Rubashov and Christ, providing an opportunity for a unique reinterpretation. References to the story of Jesus are evident throughout the novel. However, the overall picture is grotesque: as opposed to Christianity being made authentic by the life and death of the Saviour, in the novel we are only confronted with the defective and imperfect religion of a defective and imperfect Christ.

The theological nature of ideology is also illustrated by the analogy between the Party and the Church. The blurring of the boundaries between the political and the religious community is indicated by the religious commitment of all those involved in politics. The political community is structured along the same logic as the church. Consequently, its members are guided by the same 'clerical-ideological elite' (Nyirkos, 2017, p. 114) and should reasoning fail, this guidance will rely on blind faith only.

As is evident from the dialogue between Rubashov and Ivanov, his interrogator (and former comrade-in-arms), ideology has its own principles regarding politics. As reflected by Ivanov's words, the central feature of these principles is perceiving the world in general as irremediably wrong. Ivanov sees social order, the core of his judgement, as a set of disordered and contradicting political wills in a community "dominated by chaos" (Koestler, 2019a, p. 172).

He does not see the lack of a unidirectional political order as a sign of competition and freedom, but that of uncontrollability i.e. of a system where the ideal state as described by ideologues is impossible to achieve.

To provide for the creation of the conditions for a perfect society, the members of the ideological political community—namely the Party—are required to reject compromises and create a political framework where the central will of the ideology can be implemented without delay and questions. In other words, in the neo-Machiavellian ideological mindset, the creation of undisturbed political unity and unanimity—i.e. a misinterpreted consensus—is a primary political goal that requires persistent work and often sacrifices. However, our terminally corrupt world may only be changed if the true followers of the ideology get rid of the thoughts (and their advocates) standing in the way, even putting an end to their existence if necessary.

Last, but not least, I examine the moral implications of ideological thought. During his time in his cell, Rubashov's long-repressed memories of the crimes he had committed surface, because his conscience awakens and he reassesses the moral significance of these crimes, resulting in an acute feeling of guilt. This process and its natural ease represent a new experience for him, his inherently static ideological thought being replaced by a much more dynamic approach driven by doubtfulness, uncertainty and self-reproach. Deprived of the stability provided by ideology, Rubashov is forced to make a moral judgment – something he has not done for a very long time - i.e. he needs to draw the line between right and wrong and such a decision is always based on an internal debate. Rubashov suppresses the urge to start this debate by identifying concrete examples from his own past as the manifestation of Evil, instead of relying on the abstract conception of morality that characterises ideology.

When characterising the moral character of ideology, one should not fall for the common misbelief claiming the followers of an ideology are requested to disregard moral aspects while performing the desired forms of behaviour. In fact, these people do not deny the importance of moral principles, but turn them upside down, ripping them off their essence. They claim the only morally acceptable position to be the suppression of emotions and considerations born of conscience, even conscience itself, and the adherence to the objectives defined by the ideology without compromise. The central ethical concept of ideology is consistency. Therefore, one can only behave properly when adhering consistently to the patterns set by ideologists. This may also be interpreted as moral perfectionism since, following this logic, there is no "grey zone" between absolute right and absolute wrong. Doing nothing is not acceptable, but nor is not fully compliant thought, no matter how much it matches the expectations of the ideology otherwise.

In the light of the above, it is particularly interesting to see what finally drives Rubashov to admit his uncommitted sins and then to plead guilty at the trial. It is important to note that he does not embark on the path of moral and cognitive inversion (Fehér, 2005, p. 120) simply because he cannot live with his guilt, but also as an attempt to restore his moral integrity. His decision is obviously motivated by a fear for his existence, but we cannot ignore the political reasons, reflected in a chance remark by Gletkin: *"I hope, Comrade Rubashov, that you have understood the task the party is assigning you."*[1] (Koestler, 2019a, p. 264) He has not been addressed as "comrade" for a long time and now it hints at his sacrifice not being made in vain. He will lose his life, but in return he will be given the most precious price imaginable in the ideological context: once again he can be a member of the political community that won a total ideological victory.

As we could see, even though Rubashov was able to recognise the profound wrongness of the ideology, in many respects he was unable to resist its appeal. Although he eventually understood many features of the thought that had defined his life, his fate cannot be considered as a successful learning process. He got disappointed in the ideology, yet he was unable to break out of its principles. Accordingly, Darkness at Noon has a complex political-theoretical message: no matter how thoroughly and convincingly it explains the unacceptability of ideologies, it never tries to trick the reader into believing we can ever get rid of these in the world of competing political approaches.

3.2. Possible justifications for an unjustified rebellion

In the second case study, I examine the long debated relationships between order, rebellion and anarchy at the level of the individual and the society through Sándor Márai's short novel *Justice in Canudos*. This fictional reinterpretation of the events in late 19th century Brazil is of particular interest to us because it clearly illustrates human nature paradoxically contains both the need for order and the need to disrupt order.

At the heart of the novel is a dialogue which, in the midst of bloody slaughter and a state of exception in the Schmittian sense (Schmitt, 2002), creates a possibility for opposing sides to learn about each other's motivations and thoughts, relying on the common ground represented by civilisation. The language used for their conversation is significant in itself. At the beginning of their discourse, Marshal Bittencourt, Commander-in-Chief of the quasi-victorious state army

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[1] This sentence is cited from the English translation of *Darkness at Noon*: Koestler, 2019b, p. 212.

and a highly educated woman of European origin captured by the army switch to English, the only language they both speak, but not understood by anybody else in the room. It signifies the importance of a common linguistic-cultural background of sufficient depth and complexity when fundamental problems of human existence should be discussed.

During their dialogue, we learn why a woman leading a seemingly perfect middle-class life would join the 'sect' of Canudos led by the person known as the Counsellor. Her husband, a physician, disappeared overnight without a trace and she set out to find him. During her journey, she realises that her seemingly flawless life, despite its wealth and social prestige, remains empty in many ways and it prompts her to leave her life of convention and social expectations behind. This seemingly irrational quest takes her to the anarchic Brazilian community, where she finds a new meaning of her life, which long ago turned into boring routine. She describes a political system where the explicit and implicit rules of the community do not bind the self-realising individual. There is only one rule to be observed by everyone: in Canudos, it is a cardinal sin to miss the evening prayers. If someone missed more than one occasion "*there was no mercy*". (Márai, 2002, p. 281).

This narrative, presented from an individual's perspective, already hides the seeds of tension between order and rebellion, but the political nature of the examined problem becomes apparent when the text is analysed at the level of society. The inner emptiness of a life that seems perfect on the surface may be considered as the equivalent of the pervasively mechanical nature of peaceful, stable political systems providing for the well-being of their citizens. With all their offered comforts and pleasures, the nanny state and the civilisation it relies on create the illusion of a life of complete fulfilment, while they smother their citizens with all the pampering.

Canudos may be considered as a metaphor of defying the centrally planned treadmill of well-being. The woman's point of view answers Scruton's dilemma (Scruton, 2003, p. 19) in relation to the events of '68 i.e. what makes social groups living in peace and financial and cultural prosperity deny the reigning system. Reading the dialogue, we will understand political stability is not guaranteed even under the most favourable socio-economic conditions—indeed, the Marshal himself might have sensed it, too. Everyday life, becoming systematised and monotonous, inevitably carries the risk of opposition to and rebellion against the established order.

The aim of the Canudos community was therefore to completely dismantle solid social structures and create an anarchistic order free of all constraints, where full self-fulfilment is not

prevented by anything. Seeking the path to an earthly paradise that would replace mechanised everyday life may also be seen as a redemption story and the Counsellor leading the rebels has an attitude resembling that of prophets in many ways. Accordingly, the Canudos story also has distinct theological features.

This interpretation could easily be seen as a statement in favour of the rebellion, but the message of the novel is more complex. The only rule in Canudos—daily prayer—refers to a religious fervour that must be maintained at all costs, serving as the ultimate basis of anarchic order. In other words, the attempt to create permanent spontaneity ultimately leads to systemising spontaneity i.e. the system necessarily cancels itself out.

Two radically opposing concepts of democracy emerge from the dialogue. The first is the civilizational approach advocated by the Marshal, which sees democracy as a peaceful way of managing human conflicts, always aiming at compromises. This approach focuses on predictability and stability rather than the realisation of the will of the people. Opposing this view, the woman describes a 'theory of democracy' where the key to a perfect political system is compliance with the ever changing demands of the masses.

I conclude this section by examining the meaning of the term 'justice' in the title of the novel. At first reading the story seems to suggest the moral superiority of the Canudos rebels, even though they are defeated (Szabó, 2010, p. 104) Yet, the complexity of the political thought in the novel rather supports those who claim the debate is inconclusive (Bányai, 1992, p. 931; Gintli, 2012, pp. 236-237).

3.3. The politics of nostalgia

The subject of the third case study is the political theory of nostalgia. The political significance of this attitude, often seen as being pathological, even considered a *"social disease"* (Stewart, 1992, p. IX), is explored through another piece of Márai's work, *Szindbád hazamegy*. The analysis is structured around three forms of the Hungarian equivalent of the substantive verb 'be': "van" (there is), "volt" (there was) and "nincs" (there isn't). At the end of the discussion, I argue that nostalgia as a system of political thought is incomplete.

Guiding us through the last day of the life of Szindbád, a fictional character originally created by fellow Hungarian writer Krúdy, the novel describes how nostalgia relates to the established order. Perhaps the most important aspect is a pervasive sense of homelessness, resulting from a lack of stability, peace and familiarity. The conditions of the novel's present time are traced

back to clearly identified historical processes and the general conclusion is we live in times of decay and decline.

Szindbád's experiences life as living in a disintegrating political community and, accordingly, feels alienated, his attitude having both aristocratic and democratic features. The political character "*noble resentment*" (Márai, 2015, p. 93), mostly manifesting in stylistic features, is not communicated in a straightforward way. Although the lack of a real plot and the way the novel focuses on aesthetic values rather than its own story—both the characteristics of nostalgic reminiscence—seem to glorify the past, the novel actually reveals more about today than about yesterday. Accordingly, the nostalgia is seen as an identity-related issue (Gintli, 2005, p. 67) with attractive and repellent elements: while the recollections bring back memories of a better time, turning to the past necessarily means the presence is bleak.

Nostalgia sees the past as a mythical world (Hart, 1973, p. 411), which can be interpreted as a kind of right-wing utopia, or more precisely as "*muted utopianism*" (Kolnai, 2003, p. 167). Therefore, the nostalgic interpretation of the past cannot be considered historically authentic, however, it does not aim at authenticity to start with. We are closer to the truth if we define nostalgia as a *"survival strategy"* (2001, p. XVII), following Boym.

A central feature of idealising the past is emphasising moral superiority i.e. claiming that the norms of today's devalued society cannot be compared to the superior morality of yesterday. Hence one of Szindbád's greatest dilemmas: how to lead a decent life in an age of decay and depravity? He can clearly see the values of the past cannot be restored, yet his hopelessness never turns into nihilism. On the contrary, nostalgia is perceived by him as a duty, a matter of honour.

The other main characteristic of the nostalgic interpretation of the past is quasi-religiousness i.e. the contrast between a sacral past and a profane present. This is underlined by the ritual way Szindbád goes through his last day the meticulous, composed recollection of past events (see e.g. the elaborately planned meal). It all hints at nostalgia being like a ritual, and the places visited—the bath and the inn—being places of worship.

After that, I look at those aspects of nostalgia which render it somewhat incomplete compared to other political concepts. First of all, we must mention the lack of vision. Obviously, about it is not a detailed political programme which is missing, but a general concept for tomorrow with clearly identified ideas. In this context, nostalgia can be seen as both an apolitical and a political

attitude: while it despises and rejects political activities related to everyday issues, it has a well-defined viewpoint regarding political values.

Another shortcoming of the nostalgic sentiment is the resulting inability to make decisions and take action. Accordingly, it is characterised by *"reveries, fantasies and musings"* (Fülöp, 1986, p. 87) instead of activity. Thus, nostalgia is not synonymous with the reactionary attitude of trying to restore the past and it should also be distinguished from conservatism, a moderate but determined approach to defend tradition. At the same time, Szindbád's nostalgia also has some liberal traits, most notably manifested in the way he protects the dignity of the individual against the capricious majority in the disintegrated society of the present.

To sum up, nostalgia as a rather complex attitude is worthy of in-depth analysis from the aspect of political theory. It has a well-defined concept regarding the past and the present, but it lacks in terms of a proactive and clear vision compared to other ideologies.

3.4. The results of applying a literary perspective to political theory

In the conclusion of this dissertation, I summarize the particular political theoretical value of fiction by outlining four aspects, based on three case studies.

First, the importance of the literary structure should be mentioned. We should notice the role of structural diversity in Koestler's novel in disturbing the stability of ideology: the monologues, reminiscences, dialogues (and even Rubashov's weird dialogue with his own conscience) all demonstrate ways of thinking freely. Similarly, the political aspect of the conversation between the woman and Marshal is emphasised by the way the characters talk in *Justice in Canudos*. The monologue of Szindbád in the last analysed novel implicitly refers to the exclusion of the "Szindbádian" figure from the political community.

The linguistic aspect is also highlighted in the examined pieces. For example, when writing about the ideological thought, the author clearly indicates how this intellectual attitude seeks to assert power by the way language is used, by consciously banishing expressions from its vocabulary that would yield more complex thoughts of several layers. In the Canudos text, the neutral, bureaucratic speech of the Marshal and the impulsive, action-inspiring language of the rebels are clearly distinguished. This difference, however, is not absolute: the civic traditions buried in the consciousness of both sides allow for mutual understanding. In contrast, meaningful discourses cannot develop in the story of Szindbád regardless of the common language, because of the radical difference between the ways a man of nostalgia and the people of the present see and experience life.

The moral dimension also plays a central role in all three works. Throughout his time in prison, it becomes increasingly clear to Rubashov that ideology irreversibly corrupts the moral dilemmas resulting from political choices. He is acutely aware that the abstract and static nature of ideological principles undermines the contingent nature of natural moral judgement. The problem of morality in the Canudos text culminates in the clash of two opposing concepts of democracy. While the Marshal's narrative, defending the status quo, elaborates a democracy concept having stability and compromise at its core, the woman claims the primary task of politics to be serving and implementing the will of the political community. In the story about nostalgia, moral issues form part of a well-identified story of decline. Nevertheless, general social decadence does not diminish the moral responsibility of the "Szindbádian" figure, on the contrary, it gives him a strong sense of exceptionalism.

Last but not least, the religious analogy present in all three examined texts should be highlighted. As Rubashov accurately points out, ideology in many respects plays the same role for its followers as the salvific doctrine for a religious community. One of the strongest motifs of the argument presented in the Canudos story is the religious fervour of the rebels who struggle to achieve paradise on earth. In the case of nostalgia, the theological parallel lies in the meticulous, almost ritualistic recollection of the past.

I hope the Hungarian works of literature analysed in this dissertation will provide a convincing example of how the literary approach can make a significant contribution to our knowledge of the world of politics, and thus enrich the body of political theory by adding its own perspective.

4. References

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