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**DIALOGUE BETWEEN TEXTS**

**THE NOVELS AND THE SOCIOGRAPHY OF ZÁVADA PÁL**

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I.	INTRODUCTION	7
II.	FAMILY AND VILLAGE SOCIOGRAPHY	10
	1. GENRE AT THE BOUNDARIES	10
	a. The genre of sociography: its appearance and initial judgement	10
	2. THE STORY OF A SOCIOGRAPHY	19
	a. A 1986 issue	23
	b. A 1991 issue	26
	c. A 2006 issue	33
	3. LITERATURE OF FACTS VS. POLITE LITERATURE	35
III.	TRADITION AND HISTORY THROUGH THE NARRATIVE I	40
	1. PERCEPTIONS OF HISTORY	40
	2. POSTMODERN HISTORICAL NOVEL	46
	3. HISTORY IN THE WORKS OF ZAVADA	51
	4. HISTORY BEHIND THE PRIVATE LIVES	52
	5. THE SELF-REFLEXIVE HISTORY NARRATOR	61
IV.	TRADITION AND HISTORY, THE WAY WE SAW IT	70
	1. DIALOGUE OF TEMPORAL DIMENSIONS (AN ATTEMPT)	70
	2. THE PAST WITHIN A HISTORICAL WEB	80
	3. WHO IS THE HUNGARIAN?	92
	4. SUMMARY (THIRD AND FOURTH CHAPTER)	99
V.	THE POSSIBILITIES OF NARRATION	103
	1. BOUNDER-EXPERIENCES	104
	2. DEWRITING (SELF)PORTRAITS: SHAPES OF THE I	109
	a. Faces of diaries	111
	b. Faces of biographies	119
	3. THE CHANGING WE	125
	a. All, that we have seen	125
	b. Foreign(text)body	132
	4. SUMMARY	138
VI.	CROSSING THE BOUNDARIES OF GENRE	143
VII.	HISTORICAL CHOIR IN DRAMA	153
VIII.	OUR FOREIGN PORTRAITS	166
IX.	CONCLUSIONS. SUMMARY	178
X.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	184
XI.	APPENDIX	193

**Key words:** tradition, sociography, 20th century, perceiving history, -dealing with, postmodern historical novel, narrative techniques, crossing the boundaries of genre, photo

### **Summary**

In my dissertation I focused on Pal Zavada's novels and his sociography. The starting point of my hypothesis was that the literature of facts and that of fiction cannot be sharply divided, perceptions of history, the narrative techniques, the crossing and re-interpreting of genre-borders, the roamer characters, -the stories all join the pieces together and form a whole. The different narrative texts connect through dialogue, and they reinterpret and rewrite each other.

I state that the process of sociography shows a change towards fiction which can be proved through its shift from the objective and the scholarly. I am searching for the place of Zavada through reviewing the Hungarian sociographical history and I show the main directions by analysing the three issues in detail<sup>1</sup>: from the sociological erudition towards fiction, from the macro level to the micro level, from the scholarly apparatus, the objective history-narrative demand to the more subjective and linguistically determined narrative.

I also state that tradition and history in Zavada's sociographical and fictitious literary works cannot be separated from the postmodern perceptions of history and literature. The background of the research is made up of representatives of narrative research. After the theoretical background I interpret the novels by taking in consideration the theoretical background and I also try to answer the following questions: how do the novels rewrite the Hungarian history of the 20th century? how do they choose a perspective through which they can grasp the traumatic events, which still have an impact on the present, the games of the macro and micro history, the attitude towards the past of the 21st century people, the possibilities of past-present dialogue.

In the first issue of sociography the presentation of the past from an objective point of view was not successful. It tailored barriers which steered the narration towards the freedom of the fictive world, thus I believe that the novels and the issues of later sociographies can be perceived as attempting to find a way, they appear to be possibilities for narrating the past. In his short stories<sup>2</sup> and novels he shows new narrative techniques (the

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<sup>1</sup> I don't analyse the sociographical works of Zavada which haven't been published.

<sup>2</sup> I don't analyse the short stories of Zavada which haven't been published in a volume.

relation of *you* and *I*, *I*-point of view, shift of the point of view of the narrator, dialogue of texts, complicated structure, the web-like movement of characters), dealing with text from his historical point of view (history perceived as past), brought text, already written, spoken, identified historical and literary text – word by word or rewritten- parts of the text, different languages within the text. These mosaics and their relation to each other, their dialogue is what establishes the novels. Zavada, in his works rewrites certain parts of the history of the 20th century, redundantizes the canonical narratives, shows the parts that have been hidden and widens the horizon through new perspectives.

Critics often talk about trilogy when they mention the first three novels. I state that there is more to it: Zavada's sociography and novels- perceptions of history, dealing with tradition, narrative techniques, the crossing of genre boundaries, the wandering characters, repeating stories- form a common *textual space*, which moves beyond the scholarly and literary domains, the sharp barriers between the genres, thus the individual works can be read as novel- wreath which open new dimensions of interpretation.

In 2010 the short stories and dramas were not part of my research, this is why the title signals the fact that the study focuses only on Zavada's sociography and novels. The volume of short stories which appeared in 1996 is in a very close relation with the sociography and the novels. The perception of history and the narrative technique is inseparable from those. The volume of drama which appeared in 2012 during the research can also be linked with the novels.<sup>3</sup> It is made up of the dramatization of the 3 novels, I suppose that these are separate works, which add to the novels, are part of the dialogue between the texts, of the textual space which has already been shaped by the sociography and the novels. Nobody has ever written a comparative analysis of Zavada's works. We are talking about an ongoing, continuously changing work of life, process of creation, which hardened but in the same time filled the work with a lot of challenge. Pal Zavada works with new registers all the time, and through this he consummates his works and opens the way to new horizons. In my dissertation I placed his novels, sociography, drama in context, showing points of view through mirroring these works, this way making it able to (re)-read the texts.

The main objective of my dissertation was to show new ways of interpreting the works of the contemporary writer Pal Zavada, to highlight the questions along which the work of art can be approached. It is about a writer, who had professional knowledge and arrived in the field of literature with a list of publications, his scientific and literary works were separated. I began to read the social science and literary works of Zavada with the assumption that they influence each other, have an effect upon each other in a positive sense, they form a

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<sup>3</sup> I do not analyse the dramas , radio plays written by Zavada which did not appear in a volume.

dialogue, they supplement each other. My assumptions were right, the barriers between science and literature disappeared, which showed new dimensions of interpretation, he stepped out of the barriers of genre, the questions about and to history, the individual and society, grasping the past are formulated in a more adequate manner.

He wrote the novel entitled *Kulákprés* based on documents, letters, photos that he found in the attic of the house, and from this he made up the story of the family. This was completed by the research of life in the village, interviews, gathering data (old letters, photos, documents), the press of the time and historical data. As a consequence- although we could see the gradual distancing from the general fact based conclusions- sociography remained on the level of factual literature. The claim of the „personal pen”, which already appears at this level can be fulfilled in another genre. The switch happens in the 90’s, instead of the sociographical research Zavada turns to another side of literature. He states that this happened because of the political and social changes and his status in the *Holmi* editorial, his own prose-poetic experiences, the scientific text, the enlargement of the barriers of memory, the activation of the „personal pen”.

One particular characteristic of the critics was that they tried to find the place of sociography within the works. The attempt of the approach is valid for all the works, this is not surprising for the blurb sentence („on the sheets of the Kulakpres we are can witness the historical background of Zavada’s novels). Even though most of the texts mention the fact that this is the third edition of the scientific work, they emphasize the fact that they went through important changes, alterations, they do not enter into particular details,<sup>4</sup> they see the difference in the images. Beyond changing the images there are significant prose-poetic, textual and world-conveying techniques.<sup>5</sup> They regard sociography as a source, which forms the setting, time, „brought material” of the novels, such a prehistory, that becomes part of literary works in the present, this feeds it and ensures story and inspiration-material. The writer improved his writing in this and also his knowledge of the people and the village,

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<sup>4</sup> An exception is the work of Dosa Mariann, which outlines a comparative study of the three issues. Dósa 2007.

<sup>5</sup> „The photo as a literary prompt is part of all the works of Zavada: in this issue though, thanks to the Digital archive directed by Kancso Janos, the fact that other genres do not let „to be seen” becomes visible in a different way. In one of the chapters of the volume *Mielott elszotetel*, the characters comment upon some local photos. Its roundabout in that case too. It is like the descriptions of the photos become live in this book.” (Bombitz 2007)  
„The author has a playing field- even if it is not in the main text, but (from the family and the archive) in the photo sorting and commenting. Along this he widens the duty of the photos and illustrations, in some cases distances it from the main text, compensating the strict world of the monography. [...] Not to mention the fact that Zavada’s comments hint to facts that do not appear in the text, but we can guess them, thus it can be interpreted in many different ways- or even it can be fabricated or made up.” (Bazsányi 2007)

society, which are all essential requirements for the birth of the novel.<sup>6</sup>

The literary works are linked with sociography in a number of ways. As we have already seen the themes, story and characters of the *Kulakpres* appear in the novels and in order to understand the characters, their ways of thinking, talking, their history we need to know what is written in the *Kulakpres*. This village crafted within the world of fiction will become the starting point and setting of the social medium of the novels. In the same time the novels work out this dimension which was left out of the sociography, the approach of the people from the village from the point of view of their private lives, problems, personal thoughts (except the letters quoted in the sociography, which offer similar lifelike situation techniques to those of the novel).

The novels can be interpreted as continuations of the novels, the description of people belonging to certain places and periods, from another, fictitious point of view. The setting of Zavada's novels remind us of Totkomlos, which is in Bekes county, and the main characters are *tot* people who speak archaic Slovakian and who have been resettled. This ancient and unique Slovakian language is characteristic of the characters in Zavada's novels. The literary works reflect upon this special linguistic feature, the remains of the archaic Slovakian language, the mixed languages, the effects of language on identity. The giving up of this language means distancing oneself from the world of the village.

The present paper analyses the dialogue within and between the works, the relation between the people, stories, narrative techniques which can be grasped on the level of language and genre. We followed the ways through which the sociography was written and rewritten and became more village and family-centred, which will be compared through Zavada's short stories, smaller novels, and four other novels. The problem of narrating, the impossibility of mirroring the truth, the perspective that he faces while writing the sociography, are all realisations of the novels. Each novel offers a solution for narrating the tradition, history, the past, whether it is through a diary, letter, or the first person plural narrator. The stories, people, photos, documents and the found „personal pen” quoted in the sociography, language and text are in continuous dialogue with the texts of the novel. Zavada's factual and literary works determined each other, they infiltrate within each other's interpreting sphere, each other's world, in other words, textual body.

The relation between sociography and novels can be treated as a question of genre too. Bombitz attempts to place the novels in the circle of literary works that are in relation

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<sup>6</sup> Csuha 2007, Ferch 2006, Bazsányi 2007.

with the trend of literature dealing with sociographical works, thus all the Zavada works would have a sociographical-literary feature.

On the other hand the genre of the *Kulákprés* can be tipped out of the stable scientific-sociological register. First of all the *Kulákprés* is a sociography, family sociography, meets the requirements of the genre and it presents the decay of the village, of peasant society relying on scientific tools. But the work obscures this on many levels (we must think of the 2006 issue). Firstly we can mention the volume, the cover, which places it in the line of novels. This is strengthened by the blurb which places the work among literary works. The writers of the studies identify it as a scientific work which meets the requirements with adequate data, sources, interviews. The path can be easily recognized, on which the characters places, time, relations of sociography become part of the novels as well. Sociography establishes such a world and system of relations which gives place to the world of the novels too. The new characters who become part of this place fit in, we wouldn't be surprised even if we saw Jadviga, Ondris and Milota in the sociography appeared in 2006 as historical inhabitants who live in the memory. In the same time this relation is mutual, while in the case of the novels it is necessary to know the scientific background, Csuhai lays emphasis on the tools of the writer,<sup>7</sup> which become part of the sociography and the writer uses it in the case of scientific work too. Bombitz emphasises that „we cannot distinguish between the perspective of fiction and scientific objectivity.”<sup>8</sup> Csáki Judit surpasses this with her question, what is this if this is not a family novel,<sup>9</sup> Takács Ferenc adds, „its confession-testimonial version”.<sup>10</sup> And also Zavada himself agrees with this view: „For me this is suitable for a family novel.”<sup>11</sup>

The game of the different texts doesn't stop at the level of the works. We can witness the same game within the whole text too: there isn't a uniform text, but phrases which argue, complete each other and carry out dialogues. The poetics, narrative techniques, text and photo handling, perceptions of tradition and history of Zavada Pal's novels cannot be separated from the world and language that appears in sociography, it creates the sphere for the interpretation and reception, it places them in a larger context. This amount of history placed in a common space and time is fulfilled in a new structure rewritten from the point of view of genre. Within

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<sup>7</sup> Csuhai 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Bombitz 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Csáki 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Takács 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Hamvay 2006

the sphere of the textual bodies made up of wandering characters and crosstalk another photographic texture appears as an equal speech partner.

The third and the fourth chapter takes off from the presumption that a common point of Zavada's novels is the past, it unfolds the way of thinking of a community, geographical area, the power of the historical, social, economical, political strata. History is an essential part both in the sociography entitiled *Kulákprés* and in the literary works too, the macro and micro historical perspectives, the different narrative techniques, the fact that he doesn't lay emphasis on linearity and the objective approach of history, the novels made up of historical mosaics all build up history on a visual and textual level as well. Analyzing it from the side of history and tradition, interpreting the works as narrations of the past we could witness the mosaics of stories within a large spatial and time span that mould the identity of a community.

Závada's novels represent the changes that occurred in literature and history in the second half of the 20th century. Talking about the past is perceived as a narrative structure, knowing that the stories of the past (historical or literary work) are constructed stories, they do not portray wholly, since they are the result of selection, each written document is a text that lays the barriers for objectivity. The narrated past is embedded in linguistic and cultural discourse, it can be understood as a complex text-web of the past, the postmodern metafictional historical novel reflects upon the textual past, the intertextuality of the narrated text and its parodic feature.

Throughout the *Kulákprés* he lays less emphasis on the difference between official and private history, reality and fiction, the knowable and narrative past from the lively, dialogue –like past and through this it dislocates it from the sight of objective past and gets closer to literary works, as we see it further too. Zavada's all life work is the presentation of the closeness of history and literature because the trespassing between sociography and the novels happens on many levels.

After presenting the community and in some places the relations within the country in the *Kulákprés*, in the *Jadviga párnája* micro historical work we can grasp a personal view upon the history through the diary. The individual is placed in historical and social medium, he has to react to that, history, society, economy become part of personal history. The *Milota* writes this further from many points of view, it rewrites the *Jadviga*, the local history, the narrator of the honey an poppy cultural story tells and in the same time writes a personal history which he shapes and narrates. The self-reflective narrator draws attention upon how



the stories are made, their narrative feature, since the decayed stories, documents and false, simplified stories take place next to each other.

Our own stories, family stories, the story of our community, nation, country are all narratives which make up our identity. The *Jadviga párnája* and *Milota* explore the dimensions by which the macro historical events, narratives become part of the micro historical level, it shows how these stories, family traditions, personal stories shape the identity of people. These are the stories and their narration depends on the perspective, the given narrator, who moulds it according to his own pretensions. Thus the objective history, the reality beyond the narrative disappears. The stories fracture, they become unrecognizable when the narrators interpret them according to their own ideas, imperfection, injuries, doing a sort of self-healing, they try to construct their own identities through showing themselves in a suitable manner in the pile of stories. This is not changed by the fact that *Milota* appears in the character or an informant who has enough cultural and local background knowledge, he is the person who knows the stories. We always reproduce tradition along the new questions that are relevant, this is the way it can remain identity creator, can have dialogue between present and past, individual and community. *Milota*, the self-reflexive narrator makes us realize that there isn't an autonomous narrator, the concept of innocent narration does not exist, but it moves towards perspective, narrative structures, it is defined by language, it is built according to the rules of fiction. Thus knowing reality is impossible, but this is not an aim, we rather listen to a well-written story, whether this is a personal story of the cultural narrative of a community.

In the *A fényképész utókora* (Posterity of the photographer) the raising questions change, he mainly showed how the present becomes history, how the strata becomes dumb, which can all be important parts of identity, how the dialogue between present and past disappears. The past could only live in the dialogue, the continuous re-interpretation but there are only a few attempts and our main character tumbles within these. There is a huge gap between present and past, after the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century comes amnesia, so that we cannot understand and live our own present. It is a novel of big and small stories, events, official and personal stories mingle, the plot that expansively presents the three generations unfold the history of a half decade, and in the meantime we become aware of the events from what we have seen or heard in the accounts.

In the novel entitiled *Idegen testünk* we can witness the re-written mythical narrative which became the basic story of national identity in the 20th century. The well defined

structure, voice and narrative form is overwritten, it goes through a parodistic transcription. The gesture of deconstructing the narrative is present and also the presence of detail and process of creation appears to be important. Some events are highlighted by the pathetic, national ceremonial narrative, others- but not those who are in opposition with history- are chosen by the deconstructive narrative. The past is constructed within the web of texts, the narrative-like stories are in relation with each other, they make up a dialogue, they re and over write each other. There isn't a unique story, or omnipotent version since our narratives have an identity constituting feature, they are constructions that select, they narrate the past according to a type of text and voice. We should approach our questions to the past taking all these in consideration, with the will of a re-interpreting dialogue. It shows the fact that sometimes we apostolate, we form a community not taking the dangers of ideology into account and not thinking about the consequences of expressing them. The course of history is defined in the 20th century by the mental narratives, this knowledge makes it possible to understand the discourses of our past and our present as well.

Závada's historical works approach the individuals, they look at history from the point of view of the present, this is done through the voice of the individuals, or through the voice of multiple narrators and in the end the narrative of the story is born. He deconstructs the fossilized, thus dumb stories of the 20th century. For this he must construct the language and the voice of the stories and through all these he discovers new paths. Each novel stands for a language, which can be perfect to approach the past, a voice which can validly talk about history and tradition. The interpretation of these voices is our main objective in the following chapters.

Závada's works – irrespectively of genre – create such a common textual space which is built of texts that form a dialogue, they reflect upon each other and mingle. This space has a very well structured social world, customs, language, traditions, past and present, complex web of relations, these are linked through the characters who surpass the barriers. Such a place comes into being that its name is irrelevant, as the real-fictive loses its relevance too, in this textual space factual and literary works exist next to each other, completing each other, having a dialogue with each other, they over write and rewrite each other for a better understanding. The characters move in many directions within this space, each character stands for a new world if we come closer to the whole, and next to it here are people, new stories and webs of relations. In this spanning tree representing the relations, each person can be reached, the number of the acquaintances, the relation fund is not random and it does not

show equal division. There are linkers, such characters become the centre of attention who can rule over the web of relations, around whom smaller world are grouped, these are the ones who link the people together, who cut the way between two people. The texture of some novels works like this small world, in the centre there are two or three characters through whom they can meet other smaller worlds.

Závada's dramas are in close relation with the novels because they over write and rewrite them, they show new ways. He addresses the characters who appear in the known stories through the language of the theatre, its polyphonic voice, using the choir in many roles, through the shift of tone, contracting the roles, omission, highlighting. So that in the case of *Janka estéi* to wipe out the boundaries of the last two novels, and through the drama to rewrite it from a new perspective. The textual body of the dramas can be part of the web of texts which have appeared so far, and although new characters do not appear, the dramatic situation creates relation between those who did not have any relations in the world of the novels. (Janka és Adler, Viola, Michele).

Závada's works over write the frames of the genres, each of his writings moulds a multitude of opposite genres, personal and official texts are placed next to each other, literary and scientific texts, oral and written versions. He deconstructs the definitions of the genres and also that of the barriers, and he adjusts them according to the stories. Interpreting the texts of different genres we can find out new aspects of the works. He places his writings within a fictive textual space, which is full of complex relation webs, each work moves between the novel and sociography but in the same time they are separate novels and they move among novel wreaths. We can talk about wreath in the sense that it does not take away from the works, but on the contrary it enriches the works with a new layer of interpretation whether it is sociography, short story or novel. Závada's works created such a textual space in which history, the age, society and community that are created by sociography and literature, the different registers and genres fill it. The effects upon each other, the relation between the text is dialogue-like, thus it would be acceptable to claim that the characters of the novels and the stories can be written back to sociography.

Through these Závada dislocates the concept of literary work characterized by closed barriers, the sharp difference between factual literature and fiction, overwrites the boundaries between the genres, literary works and opens them toward communication. In the meantime he sketches an operable social structure, such textual space in which stories, characters move and get shape, individuals who are locked within history and society try to construct their own

identities from the narrated stories. But he dislocates the textualized perception of the narrations and opens it towards the image. In his writings (present or narrated) the relation between image and text forms a mutual dynamics, a dialogue with the past, the text with the image, the text with the text and image with image. The image enlarges a moment, highlights an event, reinforces the time, suggests eternal validity while it only shows a perspective, which remains dumb if there isn't someone who can address to it, if there isn't a text that can make it talk. This path which is open to discovery and reinterpretation is the one that upfronts Zavada's further writings, in which the narration of the past is only possible through new narrative techniques, text and image handling, opening towards other neighbouring arts, interpretation born out of the effect of different texts and continuous rewriting.

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