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ABSTRACT

**THE FORMS OF RECOGNITION AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN SÁNDOR TAR'S
PROSE**

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ABSTRACT

In my doctoral dissertation, I discuss the significance of recognition, intersubjectivity and the intersubjective characteristics of language in the works of Sándor Tar. The research grew out of a preconception that, when interpreting and discussing Tar's works, we have to take into consideration the political and social aspects of the texts to be just as important as their literary composition. I think that the adequate prose analysis of these texts should dissolve and reinterpret at the same time this tensioning dichotomy. My dissertation thus analyzes the characteristics of *sociographic* or *realist* aspects of Tar's oeuvre, not primarily in terms of the author's personality, but in terms of the literary composition and the social-historical embeddedness of the works.

In the first chapter, I will therefore outline some of the recurring observations of literary criticism on the early works of Tar. These remarks have had a significant impact on the interpretation of the works, and they sometimes also had a considerable canonizing effect. In this review, I have taken into account the main aspects of the author's works, and his persona, social position and reputation. In my opinion, these recurring observations in the early critics had a significant influence on the history of their reception and the framework of their interpretation and interpretability. In my opinion, these recurrent remarks have had a significant influence on the reception history of the works, as well as on the framework of their interpretation and interpretability.

Therefore, I considered it particularly important to explore what implicit assumptions and toposes of literary history recur in the reviews, related to the rather vague notions of *representation*, *mediation*, *realism*, *periphery* and *sociography*. In this sense, the sociographic launch of Sándor Tar's career has proved to be of fundamental importance, since a significant part of the reception has, as a result, considered the question of "credibility" to be of central importance in the discussion of his oeuvre.

At the same time, I discuss the other part of the reception that creates a binary opposition between reality and fiction, and places the emphasis primarily on the poetic creation and the aesthetic value of the texts. However this interpretative attitude, in the majority of cases, excludes or neglects the clearly perceptible social-historical and political aspects of the texts. The social determination of the characters is many times relegated to the background of the interpretations, and the focus of the reading is fixed on a much more general, existential or ontological level.

Therefore, before going into a more detailed analysis, it is important to define what exactly is meant by realistic representation and sociographic vision in the context of the dissertation. It was therefore of particular importance to pay attention to the intersubjective characteristics of language in addition to figurative features. I propose that the sociographic character of Tar's oeuvre is not only important from the perspective of literary theory and aesthetics of reception. It is also epistemologically significant, since these texts try to approach the narrativity of social reality from the perspective of human suffering. The realistic narrative of Sándor Tar does not copy reality, but creates a realist "translation" of it, so realism should be understood primarily as a specific mode of literary creation, not as the absence of it.

The mediability of reality is therefore a theoretical problem for the critical reader at most, and for Tar at least. For Tar, "realities" are primarily representations of consciousness, intersubjective relations and heterogeneous particular stories. The sociographic perspective, which can be conceived in a multiplicity of different particularities, has primarily an epistemological significance, which cannot be separated from the aesthetic creation, but it is an inherent part of it.

The possibility of narrating human suffering, which is clearly influenced by social reality, can also be interpreted as a kind of axiomatic center in Tar's entire oeuvre. Therefore, in the second chapter of the thesis, I introduced and summarized the basic principles and conceptual framework of an interdisciplinary theory that was developed in order to capture the intersubjective and social nature of the subject. In my view, Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, like Tar's art of writing, is centered on the physical and psychological needs of subjects which are deeply rooted in intersubjectivity. The absence of these needs has an elementary effect on the individual, especially on his perception of reality and his interpersonal relations. Similarly, Tar's particular realism makes the dynamics of intersubjective relations

perceptible through literature, but at the same time, like Honneth's theory of recognition, it also consistently explores the pathological functioning of the social structure.

In my dissertation, I analyzed the first four volumes of the oeuvre, those that include texts written before the change of regime (1989) in Hungary. On the one hand, these are the short stories that have been most obviously and unproblematically identified as sociographical by the reception, since they outline a familiar (socialist/state capitalist) social structure, whose abuses and repressive mechanisms are consistently thematised. In this sense, subjectivity in Tar's works always becomes important as a constitutive factor in the formation of society.

Starting from this premise, in the rest of the second chapter I first studied the primary, affective level of recognition, and how experiences of lack appear in these texts. These kinds of human relationships are present in a doubly negative sense in Tar's works, and perhaps even more so in the case of the volumes mentioned above. Firstly, in most cases they appear as source of suffering or as a desire for intimacy. The second reason is dialectically related to the first one, since to be present as an absence implies that these kinds of human relations are only rarely or very indirectly brought into focus in these short stories.

The uniqueness of Tar's works, however, lies in the fact that he succeeds in making extremely complex social psychological processes particularly perceptible through a specific technique of mental and cognitive representation. Tar's characters repeatedly struggle to distinguish the expression of love from the desire for possession or violence. It is also extremely difficult for them to experience their most intimate human relationships as something that is based on a delicate, permanent balance of autonomy and attachment.

However, in most cases, the lack of affective recognition also has perceptible structural, social causes. Therefore, from the third chapter onwards, the focus of the analysis is primarily on those short stories that deal with the discrepancies and tragedies resulting from the lack of the second level of recognition (legal and social recognition). It can be said that Tar's short stories focus in most cases on these experiences of suffering, but the roots of these are also to be found in the lack of affective recognition.

Tar's characters are, almost without exception, forced to live in *industrial feudalism* in this part of his oeuvre. Formalised social relations emerge through work that primarily rhythms and frames almost every aspect of life. The characters are mostly workers and inspectors working in an industrial environment, whose lives are mostly seen and articulated in the light of

the arbitrary communities they work in. In this way, the personal becomes inseparable from the communal, where the boundaries between the professional and the familiar become blurred. From this point of view, it becomes clear why emotional, affective recognition is predominantly absent in this part of the oeuvre.

In this way, the majority of Tar's characters become *psychic homelesses*, since they haven't received primary affective recognition starting from birth. So, in many cases they are unable to integrate safely into society and have problems choosing a partner and finding a home. The central specificity of industrial feudalism, which almost entirely eliminates the private sphere, is the main cause of these problems. It is no coincidence that the number of people who spend most of their lives living in various workers' hostels in addition to their place of work is very high.

In order to maximize productivity, workplaces operating as *disciplinary systems* need to control both space and time, enabling detailed control and precise intervention at all times. However, in addition to supervising every aspect of the working process, we must also take into account another outstanding feature of this specific technique of power: the construction of a system of punishments, and the normalising function of it. Thus, at the second level of recognition, there is almost no possibility of legal recognition, while social recognition seems to be made possible exclusively by the mechanisms of the disciplinary system, which constantly hierarchises the quality of workers.

However, the characters' precarious situation is exacerbated by the perception of so-called *etatist informalism*, where the power of "as if" constantly increases the sense of vulnerability. It undeservedly benefits certain characters and systematically deprives others of the possibility of positive self-referencing and self-respect. The perception of reality, which is utterly narrowed in this way, is suggestively depicted by Tar. On the one hand, it is pictured by the construction of a specific *animist ontology* in the narrative discourse and, on the other, by the representation of the various *cognitive dissonances* and the multiple *coping mechanisms* used to overcome them.

It is at this point that Sándor Tar's sociographic perspective becomes truly significant. In the heterogeneous voices of individuals talking about their experiences of suffering, the complex interconnections of cognitive, psychological and perceptual changes resulting from the

deprivation of different levels of recognition are clearly evident. I have analysed their typical manifestations in the third and fourth chapters of my dissertation.

In chapters five and six, I have discussed in more detail the episodes when the almost self-perpetuating disciplinary system fails. In these crisis situations, Tar's characters have an exceptional opportunity to interact directly with representatives of power. In these chapters, I have traced the biopolitical processes of power through which, in order to resolve crisis situations, the representatives of power create so-called pseudo-liminal, formal events through the ritualisation of language. In this respect, the trilogy of short stories that concludes the volume of "Why is it good for the spider?" (Miért jó a póknak?) has been analyzed in more detail as an exceptional point in this oeuvre. In this case, the inspectors directly confront the representatives of power.

In the vast majority of cases, however, dialogicity and the communicative or meaningful reflective aspects of language are not primarily to be found on the second level of recognition, but rather on the third level, which involves human relations based on solidarity. Therefore, in the sixth and seventh chapters, our attention was primarily directed towards the systems of relations mediated by linguistic interactions within the communities. I have found that linguistic humor and laughter play a key role in the formation of communal meanings and reflections in this phase of the oeuvre.

In this context, I analyzed in more detail the self-reflexive manifestations expressed in various obscene, humorous or ironic inscriptions. These are the highlights of the first half of the oeuvre, where the characters are able to reflect directly on their own situation. They have the opportunity to do all this in public spaces, and because of their visibility, these signs clearly count on the community's acknowledgement and agreement.

However, the gestures of laughter and ridicule are not only important as the most explicit markers of specific community meanings. They also play a major role in shaping and reinforcing the internal relations and hierarchies of working communities. In the first half of the oeuvre, this characteristic is most clearly evident in the evocative names of the characters. I have also found that the various dialogues that take place within the communities, along with the distinctive dramatic tone that these are based on, play a prominent role in these short stories. In many cases, these manifestations play a major role in restraining the communicative function. In fact, the proliferation of linguistic humor is often used as a method of *terror management*. It

suppresses and makes momentarily bearable high-intensity existential anxieties and sufferings, the permanent presence of which would be paralysing for individuals.

I think that Sándor Tar's fourth volume, "It Was That Much" (Ennyi volt), can be interpreted as a kind of boundary, and at the same time as a transition in his oeuvre. The experience of regime change appears to be a cardinal event that has a clear impact on the situation of Tar's characters and, closely related to this, on certain poetic features of his prose. The prose techniques used in the individual short stories were studied not only in themselves, but also within the world of the volume, in the context of each other, on the so-called macro-level of the book.

The cycles of the volume have a particular significance in this case. In my view, they are very much about a certain kind of process. The structure of the cycles also reflects and rhythmizes the dominant socio-psychological processes, the main catalyst of which was the regime change. In this sense, these short stories must necessarily fit not only with the created "reality", but also with each other, since there is no ontological gap between them. The social-historical change thematised in this volume does not leave the intersubjective relations, perception and cognition of Tar's characters untouched, nor, in close connection with this, does it leave untouched his writing techniques. It is from this volume onwards that the role of transcendence in Tar's prose is strengthened from the characters' perspective. The central element of these short stories is the creation of relationships through self-articulation via language. This particular process within the oeuvre is then increasingly linked to a notion of irredeemability and a strong metaphysical desire.

In my opinion, a further study of Sándor Tar's works may provide relevant aspects for the release and further reflection of the aforementioned discrepancies and uncertainties in its history of reception and literary policy. It can also make a fruitful contribution to the interpretation of "poverty representations" that have increasingly come into the area of interests in contemporary Hungarian literary criticism in the last few years. I have also attempted to approach Sándor Tar's writing with an interpretive attitude that considers the social, political and socio-emotional aspects of the prose as an integral part of the aesthetic creation. In this sense, I was not primarily interested in the "authenticity" of Tar's prose, but his awareness, which can be and should be understood on multiple levels.

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