

**Erika Bence–Ferenc Németh. 2016.**  
**Individual and Society.**  
**Pécs: Ethosz–Virágmandula.**

Review by

**Tünde NAGY**

Sapientia University

Faculty of Economics, Socio-Human Sciences and Engineering, Miercurea Ciuc

Department of Human Sciences

ngtunde@gmail.com

The present volume is a collection of studies divided in three parts encompassing topics concerning the relation between individual and society, mostly in a Vojvodinian context. The first part, entitled *Phenomena in Education*, includes papers that shed light on educational phenomena both from a historical perspective and from a current methodological point of view. Thus, the first paper describes the regulations that existed in Vojvodinian schools at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries, giving an insight into the regulations of the Municipal High School in Nagybercsek regarding the students' conduct not only within school premises but also in public. The regulations that set the standards of behaviour for the students reflected a system of values that were deeply present in the social milieu and the society of that time, they being the bearers and mediators of these forms of behaviour. While the second paper handles a different topic, tackling the notions of demon and demonic and the way they were introduced and understood by Geiza Farkas, a writer as well as a theoretical scientist and philosopher (in his 1923 work *Démonok közt* [Among Demons], Geiza Farkas attributes a demonic character to both natural and social forces), the last paper in this section takes the reader back to educational issues, proposing a teaching model that has been applied to teaching Hungarian as a first language in primary schools in Vojvodina. This model, seen as complementary to the official syllabus, is based on an interdisciplinary teaching method that focuses on the interrelations between disciplines, sciences, and art, and that, at the same time, gives students the possibility to express their creativity (by actively involving them in the learning process, e.g. through drawing, singing, writing poems, etc.).

Teaching genre-related concepts to students involves, for example, familiarizing them with different types of (literary) texts, such as songs, hymns and elegies, their specifics, the contexts in which they were created, and also the relation to other genres and disciplines.

The second part of the volume, bearing the title *Intercultural Reflections*, reveals how the works of poets and authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, among them Petőfi's poems, Ferenc Herczeg's works, especially his travelogue *Szelek szárnyán* [On the Wings of the Wind], Kálmán Miskolczy's feuilleton, and *Az István-szoba* [The Stephen Room], were received by the contemporary critics and readers. From the writings, we learn that translating Petőfi's poems initiated by Jovan Jovanović Zmaj in 1855 and then followed by many others soon became a common practice among translators in Serbia. The popularity of Petőfi's poems were due to the fact that, on the one hand, the social and patriotic themes present in his works complied with the growing patriotism of the so-called Nova omladina (New Serbian Youth), while, on the other hand, the translations led to the appearance of the Serbian folk epic poem, a genre that Serbian literature was lacking at that time. Petőfi's poems went through a process of folklorization, and, while their popularity in Serbia varied over the years, the ones expressing revolutionary ideas continued to be appreciated whenever they served the general political atmosphere.

Ferenc Herczeg was an acclaimed writer of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; his works, however, were not always recognized as such. Once nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature for his novel *Az élet kapuja* [The Gate to Life], due to his origins (born to a German middle-class family) and his activities with Hungarian revisionists, he was accused of irredentism and got expelled from the Hungarian Writers' Association. His works became blacklisted, including his travelogue *Szelek Szárnyán*, which was degraded and considered as a shallow piece of work without any poetical depth by his contemporaries. According to the authors, however, the literary value and complexity of Herczeg's work was overlooked by the critics of his time, *Szelek Szárnyán* being not only a travelogue but also an album of fine art/breviary created in the spirit of Art Nouveau, a genuine masterpiece of Hungarian Secession.

The next paper analyses the writings of Kálmán Mikszáth, another well-known writer of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries, focusing especially on the social, historical, and public references in his works, including the well-known novel *Különös Házasság* [Strange Marriage], his feuilleton: *Az István-szoba* [The Stephen Room], and also short stories. As is revealed in the memoirs of his wife, Ilona Mauks, Kálmán Mikszáth came up with many of his motifs and plots while spending time at coffee houses and table societies, often frequented by writers of that time. While many of his anecdotes were influenced by the members of the table society and only partly corresponded to the truth, they often have a Vojvodinian reference

and as such are of significant historical value. Finally, the last paper in this section takes the reader on a journey through historical novels written over the past centuries. It points out the intertextual character of the late-20<sup>th</sup>- and the 21<sup>st</sup>-century novels that, by breaking the chronological order of events, present and recreate facts as horizons and historical characters as horizon alternatives, leading to a constant dialogue with the 19<sup>th</sup>-century historical fiction. Worth to mention are, for example, János Házy's works that create a dialogue with the Jókai tradition as regards the presence of a broken time structure, characteristic of Jókai's novels; also, the title of one of his works, called *Dzsigerdilen* (the heart's delight) [1996], can be found with Jókai in different variants (e.g. in *Az utolsó budai pasa* [The Last Pasha of Buda] [1859], *dzsigerdilen* is a heart-warming experience; in *Fráter György* [Friar George] [1893], Buda is called *Dzsigerdilen*; in *Szép Mihály* [Pretty Michal] [1877], the beautiful slave's or wife's name is *Dzsigerdila*). László Márton's trilogy called *Testvériség* [Fraternity] published between 2001 and 2003 gives an interesting account of how historical experience is created by textual-organizational methods – thus, apart from the fact that this work is complex in itself (the parts not only continue but also write and read each other), it can also be considered as a rewritten *Kártigám* [Kartigam] (an 18<sup>th</sup>-century novel by Ignác Mészáros, based on the translation of the German novel *Menander* by David Christian Walther) and as fitting into the category of late baroque heroic novels.

The final set of papers belongs to the section entitled *Language and Identity*. The recurrent topics of this part are feelings of periphery and loss, demystification and disillusionment with the concept of homeland, the notion of border as a political, cultural, and linguistic separation. The drastic border alternations and change of political power after the Trianon Peace Treaty as well as the escalation of the Balkan crisis in the 1990s resulted in borderline situations and feelings of disappointment and hopelessness, reflected in the Hungarian literature of Vojvodina in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An example is *Határregény* [Border Novel], a family novel written by Erzsébet Juhász, relating the story of the Patarcsics family, whose lives are deeply affected by the change of the political power after the Trianon Peace Treaty. The types of borders present in the novel are not only political but also cultural and linguistic, and they cause identity crisis that the members of the family try to overcome either by travelling (travelling receives a great significance in the novel as a way of bridging borders) or by isolating themselves from the society, building their own border, an emotional one. Feelings of nostalgia and at the same time the loss of the illusion of homeland and of multicultural equality (both the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Yugoslavia are interpreted as prisons of nations), the lack of culture and perspectives are often evoked through the use of metaphors (like the metaphor of travelling and that of the traveller (e.g. the figure of Kornél Esti as the alter-ego of fleeing and transborder), the metaphor of the sea and of the train, etc.). Among the literary works that touch upon these

topics are *Kalamáris* [Ink Pot] by Ildikó Lovas, *Brikettregény* [Briquette Novel] by István Apró, *Angol Pázsit* [English Lawn] by Miklós Hornyik, Dezső Kosztolányi's novels and poems, to name only a few. It is this time that the canal-novel appears as a specific literary form, introducing the topic of canal-building, as the attempt to bring change into the destiny and culture of nations (e.g. Károly Molter's *Tibold Márton* [Márton Tibold], János Herceg's *Régi dolgainkról* [On Our Old Things], and many others).

Despite the attempt to highlight all aspects of this book, this seems to be an almost impossible task, taking into consideration the variety of topics it covers and the vast array of information it offers. The papers give a valuable insight into the social, political, and cultural aspects of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century Vojvodina alongside present experiences and impressions and also raise current issues of great relevance. While the themes covered are complex in nature, the book is written in such a manner that is easily understandable and thoroughly enjoyable.