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**„Until a Woman achieves It”
Hungarian Woman Bestseller Writers in the 20th Century
THESES**

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(1. Introduction) If we choose bestsellers (or in a broader sense literature) as the subject of our study, it is impossible to avoid going back to the problem of production (writing) and consumption (reading) even though they are not associated with the construction of modernism in the most favourable way. When interpreting a bestseller, Sutherland did not consider newspaper reviews too important, although it might not be insignificant what different media and institutions say about it at the time of publishing, which can affect its success and lifespan. The works of those women writers discussed here were associated with different reading attitudes, sometimes based on prejudices: critics were quite sceptical about the books of women writers, their success was looked upon with suspicion and at last they were hard on the circle of their 'women' readers (which could be well defined according to some). They regard bestsellers as part of the industrial trade, in close connection with 'mass consumption' and 'mass production', based on the capitalist theory that any investment should return as soon as possible. Although the work contains references to publishing activities and copy numbers, as Péter György put it: 'reading and consumption are not two different ideas or social activities, not two different worlds'.

(2. The success and/or cult of a woman novelist? Cécil Tormay) She defines the subject of nation states, and especially that of the nationalist concept of nation state as male, which is true, however one must take note that such societies produced their 'female subjects', who were present in the official propaganda as 'role models'. But the 'woman' composed in this way did not only appear in the discourse in connection with 'public speeches', but women writers also contributed to their construction with some of their works (as the author mentions it in connection with *Bujdosó könyv*). The political appropriation of Tormay has been challenged, but probably it would be a 'blindspot' in the interpretation if one did not connect her present day popularity and cult with political content. The following chapters aim to summarize Cécil Tormay's career (not to study her cult) and to re-read her short stories and novels, in whose background there is the literary theory, which says that several factors are necessary for the long term success, the symbolic practice towards particular texts contributes to a woman writer, who, in Bourdieu's words, is 'well' constituted in the literary 'field'.

Perhaps it appeared in a more elaborate way in her books that came out in the mid-1910s. The novel called *Emberek a kövek között* (1911) is set in an isolated world, unspoilt by the 'industrial' world, the events are described from the point of view of Jella, a shephard girl living on the edge of a Cratian village along with her mother banned by the community, who is described rather archaic in her desires, feelings and uncouthness. In *A régi ház* (1914) the great architect, Ulwing Kristóf holds the education of the children under control in a patriarchal family, but the honours and ranks that can be valued in the capitalist society, can also be acquired at school, but for the girls only the household chores and music lessons remain. *Az ősi küldött*, a trilogy written at the end of the writer's life, is a big historical narrative, an apocalyptic and eschatological vision with the description of the simultaneously heathen and Christian national characters and the 'gateway role' and at the same time a stream-of-consciousness novel presenting the protagonist gaining consciouness.

(3. An introduction to reading 'the monumental mush'. Renée Erdős's prose) The author's point of view is that Renée Erdős was not so much of a (woman) erotic novelist as a writer who did not based her family novels on the economic growth throughout generations, since the protagonists were usually well-off, but on the way women and (to a lesser degree) men can find sexual happiness. The fact that such various critical judgements are articulated, ranging from those interpreting them as 'subversive' to those that consider them 'confirming' narratives, might derive from the strategies in the texts. In the novels the aritculated interpretations of the world contribute to the clash of generations, not crying for any conception existing either in the present or in the past, as the attempts of self-identification expected of the heroins just deepen the tragedy instead of becoming a means of escape either for being a woman or towards it. Earlier, the function of popular fiction was described with the help of varied strategies as the incentive or soother of social worries, but as Bahtianist views catch on they tend to be interpreted as the 'compound vibration' of parody and meaning, or the conversation of multilingualism, mimicri, discourse and self-reflection. All the works of Erdős are discussed in connection with family novels, and some of her novels are comprised in the interpretation that are not so well-known today. Four of her bestsellers are subject to a separate study: *Santerra bíboros* (1922), *A nagy sikoly* (1923), *Borsóhercegnő* (1923) and *Báró Herzfeld Clarissz* (1926)

(4. The author of historical bestsellers. Irén Gulácsy) It was not only *Fekete vőlegények* (1927), a novel by Irén Gulácsy, which attracted a wide circle of readers, the works of other female writers were also popular. The popularity of woman historical novels can be explained away by different reasons: the texts made sexuality radically explicit (in

these texts the heroin is often seduced or raped), they emphasize that women were written in history, and as opposed to those novels suggesting a mimetic interpretation of history the novels of women writers re-write the paradigms of the historical novel in a strange fashion, focussing on the emotional struggles of women in connection with their love of their homeland. The historical and literary interest in contemporary historical novels and historical narratives made it possible to re-interpret the probability, the truth and the fictional elements in the old narratives, the distrust in the great narratives and the specifically woman history writing. The heroin of her book *Jezabel* (1944) is an adventurer, who rambles across the whole territory of culture, the woman crossing sexual relationships, the body of the dead woman in the society, the voice of contradictions, the figure of the foreign woman ('a Kotromanics descendant'), a dubious character, the self-hating femme fatal of a patriarchal society, a woman who is considered masculin. In the novel *Pax Vobis* (1930) it is really Mária, who wanders across all the sites of the world of the novel, the plot and the narrator always keeps to the peregrination of the heroin except a few digressions.

(5. Multiculturalism, (post)colonialism, emigration. Jolán Foldes [Yolanda Foldes], the transcultural writer) In her works, written in Hungarian, the homeland and the nation is depicted as a group of individuals, who are sometimes foster an intimate relationship and sometimes stigmatize each other, and the characters try to balance between these groups (successfully or not so well) showing those gaps by which they have to create their new identity, which sometimes proves to be very painful. The people in the suburbs and colonies, the wanderers and the refugees were not included in the big family of the nation, they play an important role in describing its limits and in the (post)modern era their narratives might find their way to the centre of history, and warn us that the story of the modern city is happening somewhere else and not where some tried to locate it. The international success of *A halászó macska uccája* (1936) might be explained by the places being represented metaphorically, their construction is more telling than their identifiable connections to reality, it is rather their symbolic separation, construction or location that refers to the social status of those who live in them. The lives stuck in the little alleys near the busy roads form an elementar experience for the expatriates living in the area, although the alley is in the city centre, the emigrants hardly ever leave it, the tragedies of everyday life take place here. The importance of shaping the place is felt by others too: the landlady's plans to paint the room in which the banker lives are continuously changing in accordance with the extent to which she can feel the typical expatriate sickness on the old banker ('he has gone mad'), how often he visits his countrymen. The cackling character attributed to the novel might be a result of the alternation of short

sentences or the narrator's reflections on the story, which sometimes seem to be surprisingly appropriate, the choice of the title, or the thematic of 'daily life'. The unusual density separates the text from the realm of everyday speech, and the permutating repetitions of the same story distinguish it from the concrete forms of declarations. Once the emigrants get a job then they lose it, they fall ill, then they recover from it, they become homesick, then they are relieved, they arrive in Paris, sometimes they go home just to return in the end. The text can be filled in with the proper names critical to defining the location, the historical events are depicted as processes taken out of their contexts: the observations about a nation are of general validity, he manipulates by widening the concept of time.

(6. Some women writers who achieved considerable success in the first half of the 20th century) The short summary of some Hungarian women writers who ascended to the level of bestseller writers in the first half of the 20th century (Tutsek Anna, Szederkényi Anna, Bródy Lili, Bozzay Margit, Zsigray Julianna, Mollinány Gizella) does not only discuss their most successful works but also comprises some of their other books as far as the scope of this study allows it. This list certainly shows a preference towards the writers of the 1930s as that can be considered the period of the most successful women writers, in the 1920s the women writers with the biggest number of sales were the above discussed Cécile Tormay and especially Renée Erdős. This list cannot be complete as the sales figures have only been accessible since the 70s not just in Hungary but also in the English speaking world, they are kept secret by the publishing companies. In the end it is worth mentioning that the study of these literary careers can bear significance in the next phase of the research.