

Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities

Thesis – Summary

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WOHL SISTERS: LITERATURE, PRESS, SALON

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Janka Wohl (1843 -1901) and Stefánia Wohl (1846 - 1889) have not yet been a monograph, in spite of that they counted dominant figure of the Hungarian literary and cultural life of the second half of the 19th century. Their activity was expounded on the area of the literature, the press and the salon. In my thesis I undertook a comprehensive process to the work of Wohl sisters following this triple division which meant these actions: rereading of their works, their literary criticism reception's exploration, their literary working class in the contemporary literature, the analysis of their press activity, the reconstruction of the story of their literary salon and function. My researches are based on contemporary sources (press, memoirs, correspondences), microanalysis, discourse examination, comparison, and philological investigations. In my thesis are decisive the historical approach, the social historical context, the gender - theories, the media history, the philology, the comparative literature and the literature sociology viewpoints.

The literary activity of Wohl sisters

I review their literary career through their volumes chronologically. I examine Janka Wohl's first and at the same time single volumes of poetry (1861) in the relation of the contemporary critics's womanhood notion and their expectations supported with the female authors. In those years was a wide debate in the Hungarian literary criticism setting out from Pál Gyulai's article titled *Írónőink* (1858) that dealt with the women's literary situation. The man critics invested their energies in the forming of a system of norms which it can use to place tried to interpret the female authors in the national literature. Most of all it was demanded of them to work their gender's special experiences, feelings up. I compare the Janka Wohl's volume with the volume of three other women writers (Flóra Majthényi, Atala Kisfaludy, Malvina Tarnóczy), that appeared also in 1861, except Flóra Majthényi's work, that appeared in 1858. I examine the authorial aim in the four anthologies, how they relate to each other and to the contemporary woman writing's discourse and the national literature. I argue that although the contemporary literary criticism began to take into account women's literary achievements, but only within limits. The critics interest was mainly directed towards the (young) female soul, and welcomed those woman poets who stayed within circle assigned to them (simplicity, family relations, emotion). The female poets conversed and argued with those viewpoints, expectations of the critics, and tried themselves to shape their own poetic picture.

After this I touch on Janka Wohl and János Arany's meeting circumstances, friendship, working relationship. The literature generally focuses on their meeting and to the famous

poem from Arany that can be found in Janka Wohl's memory album. I examine some poetic dimension of their relations. The young girl regarded the acknowledged poet as a master of her, she sent him regularly her poems and requested about them a review. Based on their fragmentary surviving correspondence it seems that Arany undertook the role of a mentor. Although he didn't make his female pupil and never appreciated her poetry in the press, indirectly supported her poetic career because both of his magazines (Szépirodalmi Figyelő, Koszorú) published several times the poems of Janka Wohl.

The lifestyle literature (etiquette, interior decorating, cosmetology) determined Janka Wohl's literary action, not the poetry. I emphasize the contexts between the Janka Wohl's advisory books and the Magyar Bazár since the magazine was as an advertising surface for them, the volumes referred back to the journals with their publisher (Athenaeum) and author (Egy nagyvilági hölgy). Janka Wohl's publications with a home and household were published regularly under name "Egy nagyvilági hölgy" on the Magyar Bazár's columns from 1878, and she also led the etiquette column. Her magazine devoted big attention for the applied arts, furniture, interior design in the 1880s and 1890s especially. The *Modern asszony brevidáriuma* (1895) was the Magyar Bazár's Christmas surprise for the subscribers in 1894. Janka Wohl involved the readers in the collection of materials. She asked for their advice for example in a call about the facial skin, hair and teeth care in the autumn of 1894. In this chapter I examine her book titled *Az otthon* (1882) and I show its connections with women's emancipation, civil values and Art Nouveau.

Considerable translator activity is connected to Janka Wohl's name beside her original works (book of poems and public literary works). She translated English and French novels primarily. She translated at the first time Dickens's novel, titled *David Copperfield* in full into Hungarian in 1877. In addition, she was the first woman, who was entrusted with translation by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (John Addington Symonds *Renaissance in Italy III*, 1886).

Her younger sister's literary career developed in a different way. János Arany published Stefánia Wohl's first tales in Szépirodalmi Figyelő edited by him. Her storybook (1865) was responded positively both the critics and the general public, and favourable criticism appeared from it and it was published many times (1865, 1871, 1875, 1898). These stories bore Andersen's impact: the protagonists are animals, plants and objects; novellistic characteristics; death's motif; allegorical manner of speech. Her storybook not only reckoned with a children

public, since its some pieces were published first in belletristic organs (Szépirodalmi Figyelő, Koszorú, Családi Kör, Fővárosi Lapok) and the recensions interpreted it in the context of female writer not the children literature.

I deal with Stefania Wohl's second novel titled *Aranyfüst* (1887) thoroughly. I examine its reception and I insert it into the fiction of the age. I analyze the work from the point of view of fashion and appearance, what kind of role plays the dress in the story and in the single character's characterization. On the one hand it is justified because Stefánia Wohl worked for fashion magazines, on the other hand the dress descriptions are determining in the text that are interwoven with the social and political contents of the work. I reveal the gender aspects of the volume of short stories titled *Éva*: the woman picture of the narration, women's emancipation, the phenomenon of the New Woman.

I examine the international reception of Janka Wohl's French biography of Ferenc Liszt (1887) and Stefánia Wohl's roman title *Aranyfüst* (1887) transnationally: how they have appeared in the other literary systems stepping out their formation's geographical linguistic region, through their expenses, translations, and what kind of interactions can be observed between the text's production and the circulation. Janka Wohl's biography of Liszt was published first in French, soon after in English (1887) then in German (1888). In the book come to the fore the recent transnational discourse's familiar elements as the relation of recipient country, homeland, ethnicity and the rethinking of the language and the nation's traditional context. The *compatriot* can be found in the subtitle as a plural concept refer to several countries. Janka Wohl's book (on foreign language and in a medium) tries to be useful to that through Liszt's shape far from the mother country, while the Hungarian identity outlined in the text doesn't rule out the linking to the other literary systems and national traditions. The novel titled *Aranyfüst* appeared in 1888 in French, in 1889 in German, in 1890 in English (in 1896 the second edition). For the today's transnational aspects of investigation may be interesting because while his author was writing kept the foreign appearance in view, that influenced to the text's production (structure, choice of name, political, cultural, geographical indications). Thanks to this its reading and interpretation didn't cause trouble to the foreign critics, they recognized in it at the same time the *modern* and the *Hungarian* life's typical characteristics.

The press activity of Wohl sisters

The editorial career of the sisters unfolded in the medium of the fashion magazines. Although I refer to their previous magazines but I deal with the *Magyar Bazár* (1873-1901) more intensive (reading public, contact with urban institutions, corporate background, his place in the contemporary press market, women's emancipations ambitions, taste's shaping, belletristic contents). I argue that the fashion magazine namely the *Magyar Bazár* is not an isolated journal, but is connected to the contemporary cultural, literary, social and economic processes and actors.

I based the feminist and journal researches (Rita Felski, Margaret Beetham, Sean Latham, Robert Scholes) on the journalistic and editorial work of Wohl sister, where is emphasized the intersection, the interaction, the preference of the networking, the nation - community-publicity women's participation and the exploration of the self - organization and the solidarity's forms rethinking.

In the second half of the 19th century, the fashion magazines helped with their columns the development of the national women's networks. The rhetoric of the fashion magazines (including the *Magyar Bazár*) has created a virtual salon on their columns, they provided space to the meeting, the conversation, business and cultural exchanges in their columns. According to McLuhan bonmot that the ads are actually news, the open space (reader questions and answers) is a news feed in which personal, cultural, economic, information mix with each other. In this columns we can study the reader attitudes, preferences, consumption habits, mentality, and draw attention to the other manners of the text usage: copying, cutting, sending, writing, sticking, sewing. Their operation and function can be parallel with certain organizational characteristics of today online social networking sites: commentators under a pseudonym, forums organized by topic.

The *Magyar Bazár* separated from the equality movements generally, however linked to the several levels of the women's emancipation. The women's work was in the editorial program's centre of the Wohl sisters. They named first the working woman as a new target group in the national press. The *Magyar Bazár* supported the women's study (grammar school, university) with his publications, intellectual and financial independence, employment. It also dealt with sport, another area of the women's emancipation. The magazine popularized the gymnastics, tennis, fencing, cycling.

Janka and Stefánia Wohl edited carefully the Magyar Bazár's belletristic supplement: they showed new ideas and artistic ambitions to the rural middle class. On the one hand the Magyar Bazár was primarily a fashion magazine, that published literary texts beside many others, on the other hand it contained valuable works from the prestigious authors that were first come to light, as in case of János Arany and participated in the start of writing careers, such as Minka Czóbel. Furthermore we could make sure that the Magyar Bazár's literary publications were observed, commented, received by other press products or selected to professional reviews. In the 1890s the Magyar Bazár has worked as an intellectual circle's publicational surface, which focused on Zsigmond Justh. The principal stake of a journal is, whether you can gather like-minded people around him, who then inspire each other. This succeeded to the Magyar Bazár as a fashion magazine exceptionally thanks to the editor's person and salon.

Wohl salon

The salon of Wohl sisters was the main element of their culture and society organizer activity, that was a popular meeting place of the famous intellectuals, artists, politicians in those days. Several researchers have pointed to the relationship between modernity and the salon, namely that the salon has stimulated the development of modern art and literature. I insert the Wohl salon in this framework. I review the salon's eras, visitors, events, functions, and I place it in the contemporary social life in Budapest.