

Cserjés, Katalin, Márton Hoványi and Réka Varga, eds. *A téboly menyasszonya: (Elme)betegség és terápia Hajnóczy Péter életművében – Interdiszciplináris Hajnóczy-tanulmányok* [The Bride of Madness: (Mental) Illness and Therapy in the Oeuvre of Péter Hajnóczy]. Budapest: ELTE – MűGond. 2023. 199 pp.

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During a mere six years of professional writing, Péter Hajnóczy produced an oeuvre widely known among the lovers of twentieth-century Hungarian literature. From his first work, *A fűtő* [The stoker], to his last, *Jézus menyasszonya* [The Bride of Jesus], Hajnóczy advocated for individual freedom during the communist regime. The Hajnóczy Péter Hagyatékgondozó Műhely (HPHM) have arranged, classified, and digitized Hajnóczy's unpublished texts. Partnering with Márton Hoványi, the author of a dissertation on Hajnóczy's poetry, the HPHM organized the VII. International Hajnóczy Conference, *A téboly menyasszonya (Elme)betegség és terápia Hajnóczy Péter életművében* [The Bride of Madness: (Mental) Disease and Therapy in the Oeuvre Péter Hajnóczy]. This edited volume publishes a selection of the talks.

Two of the editors' contributions provide examples of correspondences among Hajnóczy's works. Professor Cserjés's "A megnyílt elzárja roppant távolság" [The Opening One is Closed by Vast Distance] focuses on unusual, "mad" passages in Hajnóczy's texts: intentional incorrections, incomplete sentences, unanswered questions, and some characters' extensive intellectual explorations. In Hoványi's paper, "A téboly tropológiája Hajnóczy Péter írásművészetében" [The Tropology of Insanity in the Writing of Péter Hajnóczy], the author tries to identify the forms in which insanity and folly are manifested in Hajnóczy's writings and concludes that insanity can become a shaping force in some of Hajnóczy's works. He finds that the text titled "A jelentés" [The message] exhibits clear signs of linguistic schizophrenia. Hoványi also investigates the liminal quality of *homo sacer* (as Giorgio Agamben defines the term) bestowed by madness as a form of self-defense.

Still, this search for insanity in Hajnóczy's oeuvre is curious because, as Péter Srádi explains, "insanity" rarely carries an equivalent weight to alcohol. Alcohol is widely known as the strongest fiber in the fabric of Hajnóczy's oeuvre, and almost every element of the symptomatic characteristics of substance use appears in his works—. Srádi's study "Téboly és a

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² titles are translated by the reviewer unless indicated otherwise



reparáció lehetősége a Hajnóczy életműben" [Insanity and the Possibility of Reparation in the Oeuvre of Hajnóczy], examines instances of behavior therapy and various psychological issues in the novelist's writings. Srádi concludes that, while the act of writing becomes a process of self-justification and self-reinforcement, maladaptive and dysfunctional attitudes and mindsets diminish the chances of repair. In contrast, Zsák-Somogyi Katalin discusses the possibility of using Hajnóczy's work successfully in bibliotherapy. Special emphasis is placed on the widely known novella *A halál kilovagolt Perzsiából* [Death Rode Out of Persia – title translated by Hajnóczy], focusing not on Hajnóczy the author but "the man," the protagonist of the novella.

Many of the essays presented in this volume analyze the concept of insanity with Michel Foucault's early theory on insanity and madness. Foucault's interest in insanity, mostly like Hajnóczy's, lies in the structures of power regarding mental institutions. Zsófia Németh, an expert on Alíz Szépvölgyi,³ argues that the psychological symptoms outlined in "Dinamit" [Dynamite], a play discovered among the documents found after Hajnóczy's death, illuminate the author's sociographic intentions, as the symptoms are oriented towards the given era and can be applied to both individuals and society.

Aletta Borbíró pairs Foucault with *Az elkülönítő* [The Isolation Room], "A nagy jógi légzés" [The Great Yogic Breathing], and "Karosszék, kék virággal" [Armchair with Blue Flowers] to demonstrate how diseases thematize control and the absence of control. Borbíró's chapter is also an exceptional reading of *Az elkülönítő* as she frames the story as one about the author himself during the time he wrote his well-known sociography.

The Foucauldian perspective is also a crucial underpinning to Barnabás Pótor's contribution, an analysis of "Az alkoholista" [The Alcoholic]. In this short story from 1973, the identification of the storyteller and the main character becomes confused by several sentences accentuated by quotation marks. According to Barnabás Pótor, the ambiguity between the narrator and the character named Márai is related to the staging of the structures of health/(mental) illness and normality/abnormality as "Az alkoholista" attempts to dismantle the illusion that these concepts could be unequivocally, categorically separated. Another example of the studies motivated by Foucault's focus on insanity is Márton Sipos's chapter, arguably one of the most incisive and argumentative studies in the book. Sipos focuses on insanity in Hajnóczy's body of work through giving a special emphasis to the repetitive, recurring passages in the texts. This study's attention "to the form" seeks to evade the epistemological pitfalls into which thematic approaches often fall when studying insanity, and it highlights an important characteristic at the core of most—in Foucault's sense—epistemic experiences of madness. It is

³ Hajnóczy wrote a sociographic study, *Az elkülönítő* [The Isolation Room], about the unsettling story of a young woman who was undeservedly locked away in different asylums during the 1970s in Hungary. Hajnóczy based his protagonist on Alíz Szépvölgyi, an actual individual he had interviewed before. They became good friends and, furthermore, Hajnóczy's legacy later also aroused interest in Szépvölgyi's literary work, especially her autobiography, *A humánium nevében* [In the Name of Humanity].

Foucault’s earlier approach in *Maladie mentale et psychologie* [*Mental Illness and Psychology*, title translated by Foucault] from 1954 that, according to Lajos Somogyvári’s study, gives accessibility to insanity in Hajnóczy’s work. Somogyvári undertakes a parallel investigation of the interview database of the Russian Research Center recorded between 1949 and 1953 and the world of *Az elkülönítő*. Somogyvári finds that a distinct ideological framework for state-controlled mental health treatment emerges.

For Katinka Tóth, it is not Foucault who links insanity and literature; rather, the mental condition known as Michael Kohlhaas syndrome, which received its name in German-based medical terminology from Heinrich von Kleist’s novella and its roots in the sixteenth century. Tóth’s study considers two modern remakes of the novella: Christoph Hein’s *Der neue (glücklichere) Kohlhaas* [The newer, happier Kohlhaas – title translated by Hein] and Péter Hajnóczy’s *A fűtő*. Two papers offer a study of *A halál kilovagolt Perzsiából*. Gábor Csíkvári is interested in the workings of the plot devices in the novella through his contemplative chapter “A delirium regénye” [The Novel of Delirium]. Editor Réka Varga compares the work to a corpus of Hungarian medieval visionary literature. Varga, while in search of similarities, also diligently evaluates those cases where similarities are merely superficial.

The literary, psychological and interdisciplinary studies in *A téboly menyasszonya* investigate Hajnóczy’s oeuvre and many of them grant a particular importance to posthumous writings. Reading the book also reveals unexpected influences, recent debates and an ongoing exchange of views regarding Péter Hajnóczy’s work, with a lot more interplay than one would expect. The book is dedicated to the memory of two outstanding scholars, acquaintances of Péter Hajnóczy: Endre Szkárosi and József Tamás Reményi, who would appreciate that tone for sure.