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“He was the first to advocate the slogans of modern criticism in Hungary”

Imre Henszlmann’s Work in Dramatic Theory and Drama Criticism

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I. Research aims and objectives

In the field of Hungarian Cultural Sciences and Art History, Imre Henszlmann has been known as an art historian and the founding father of art conservation in Hungary. The reason for this identification was his appointment to professor at the Department of Art History and Classical Archaeology in 1872, which signalled the institutionalization of the discipline of Art History in Hungary. Henszlmann's oeuvre is multifaceted: in his early career he obtained a medical degree, then turned toward art history, and later toward literary history and drama criticism. He called attention to the importance of conserving art relics and monuments in Hungary, carried out research to find Hungarian art treasures, and regularly published his theoretical studies, critiques and creative writings in contemporary periodicals. Despite his diverse activities his name is canonized almost exclusively in the context of the discipline of Art History. Art historians remember Henszlmann as an art conservator, architect and art historian, while his work in literary theory and drama criticism is hardly ever discussed. His oeuvre, however, can be divided into two parts: his work as a literary scholar and drama critic is just as significant as his well-researched and -analysed endeavours in art history, including art theory, art education, art conservation and architecture.¹

The aim of my dissertation is to discuss and analyse Imre Henszlmann's work as a literary scholar and drama critic, as well as to put my findings in the context of the history of literature in Henszlmann's age.

Through processing and presenting various texts by Henszlmann and his contemporaries, my doctoral dissertation shall explore where the art critic's work may be placed among contemporary efforts of creating a Hungarian national culture. A further objective is to determine Henszlmann's significance as a drama critic in the contemporary processes of the history of literature and of culture in Hungary. Finally, going beyond the drama critic's era, I shall map his reception: analysing what literary historians call the debate of *fin de siècle* tragedy I shall examine what succeeding generations borrowed – either by implication or by direct means – from Henszlmann's principles and norms as a literary scholar and drama critic, and whether these borrowings had a direct or indirect impact and formative power on the development of literature and culture in Hungary.

All these aims serve to add more details and shades to the discourse that not only foregrounds Henszlmann's work as an art historian but determines his significance exclusively

¹ Some recent findings of research in this area include HORLER 1997, 105–107; LAMIOVA 1997, 108–110; MAROSI 1997, 113–114; TÍMÁR 1997, 110–112; TÖRÖK 1997, 115–116; BECHER 2007; BARDOLY 2013, 334–336; BUBRYÁK 2013.

in this context. Furthermore, I wish to direct attention to this role of Henszlmann – which I believe is unjustly forgotten but highly significant in literary history – by limiting my research to his work as a literary scholar and critic, as well as to the importance and mapping of this work.

II. Research methods

My research is restricted to the period between 1841 and 1846, since it was at that time that Henszlmann wrote and published about literature and drama theory most actively. The period examined is framed by two extensive theoretical works of his, the first one being *Párhuzam az ókori és újkor[i] művészeti nézetek és nevelések közt, különös tekintettel a művészeti fejlődésre Magyarországon*² [Parallels Between Views and Education in Ancient and Modern Art, with Especial Regard to the Development of Art in Hungary], published in 1841, at the beginning of his career, and presenting the theoretical bases learnt from Daniel Josef Böhm, as well as Henszlmann's own growing ambitions. It was in this study that Henszlmann posited the basis of the criteria of his system of concepts: the triad of “*characteristic–vital–expedient*” and he made a proposal concerning the establishment of art education in Hungary, elaborating its structure and program. The end of the period is marked by his 1846 study, *A' hellen tragoedia tekintettel a' keresztyén drámára*,³ [Hellenistic Tragedy With Regards to Christian Drama,] which signals the matured and summarised theoretical and practical knowledge he gained and created about literature, drama and, in relation to these, fine arts. In *Hellenistic Tragedy* Henszlmann presented a new view and method. He discussed Hellenistic dramatic plays, comparing them with “Christian drama” or, more specifically, to Shakespeare's tragedies. The aim of this comparison was to reconsider and rewrite the contemporary view that appreciated ancient Greek drama exclusively. My dissertation aims to present and interpret both *Hellenistic Tragedy* and *Parallel* from the aspect of art theory, the history of aesthetics and cultural studies. One of the reasons for this aim is that *Hellenistic Tragedy* – this almost three-hundred-page-long monumental study in literary theory – does not have a modern edition, nor has it been thoroughly analysed to this day.

Besides these two texts I shall also discuss shorter pieces: articles by Henszlmann and his contemporaries published in 19th-century periodicals, such as *Athenaeum*, *Életképek* [Scenes from Life], *Magyar Szépirodalmi Szemle* [A Review of Hungarian Literature] and *Regélő Pesti Divatlap* [Pest Fashion Magazine], which demonstrate the development of Henszlmann's

² HENSZLMANN 1990, 7–146.

³ HENSZLMANN 1846a, 128–428.

drama theory and its reception in the period in question. In order to map the drama critic's theory and attitude, I shall interpret the articles he wrote about Shakespeare's plays their performance in Hungary and published in *Pest Fashion Magazine* between 1842 and 1844,⁴ as well as his shorter articles about drama theory.⁵ My chosen corpus has not yet been collected, processed or positioned in the context of either Hungarian literary history or Henszlmann's role in the literary world of the period. Therefore, I shall analyse and discuss these texts both individually and compared to one another, and then in relation to the Hungarian and international history of literature and culture of Henszlmann's age.

III. Findings and conclusions

Imre Henszlmann's legacy in drama theory and literary criticism is a little-explored chapter in the history of Hungarian literature and literary criticism; thus, my dissertation primarily aims to fill this hiatus. My research does not consider whether Henszlmann's system of norms and expression of critical opinion is still relevant in our modern-day perception of (the history of) literature. Instead, it focuses on the problematics of how these norms and expressions operated in Henszlmann's age and whether their impact may be detected in the literary world of posterity. My dissertation records those works of the drama critic which lend themselves to the exploration and definition of the norms Henszlmann set, summarises them in accordance with "what he inherited from his predecessors and what we may inherit from him – that is, how he developed what fell to his share"⁶ – and evaluates the way these norms were used, touching upon their operation and impact in the period in question.

"The most vital twofold task [of criticism] is normative evaluation and the evaluative formation of norms,"⁷ which means that research in the history of criticism is fundamentally *the exploration of norms*. My research is based on this notion: on the one hand, I collect, organise, discuss and briefly evaluate Henszlmann's studies in the theory of criticism and his critical reviews with the aim of comprehensiveness and according to my own set of criteria. On the other hand, I keep another crucial aspect of the history of criticism in mind: the examination of how these norms of criticism were established, related and employed.

To my knowledge, Henszlmann's merit is unprecedented in Hungary: his development and rigorously consistent use of a system of norms in art criticism which is not only objective

⁴ HENSZLMANN 1842c, HENSZLMANN 1842e, HENSZLMANN 1843b.

⁵ HENSZLMANN 1842a, HENSZLMANN 1842b, HENSZLMANN 1842d, HENSZLMANN 1843a.

⁶ DÁVIDHÁZI 1992, 10.

⁷ DÁVIDHÁZI 1992, 45. For the terms used by Dávidházi and the contents of these two notions in more detail see 34–40.

but rules out any chance of subjectivity is of unparalleled significance. According to Péter Dávidházi, Bajza and his colleagues “borrowed their principles from Lessing and Schlegel and were driven ‘more by learned starting points than deliberate and well-considered ones’, making decisions in debated issues by automatically relying on the use of quotations.” The need for the development of independent norms in criticism was formulated by János Erdélyi in the early 1860s.⁸

Apparently Henszlmann created his independent system of notions (“*characteristic–vital–expedient*”) as early as in 1841 with the publication of *Parallel*, which he posited as the norm for the critical evaluation of works of literary works and artefacts, and he called upon critics of the era to account for the use of borrowed norms. In response to Pulszky’s criticism of *Parallel* Henszlmann asserted it was “not enough any more to simply feel something about art – we need also to know and be aware, and it is crucial to consider why that certain piece of art is to our liking, why we find it good or excellent, because if we are content with declaring it beautiful and ideal and claiming that it shows Nature at its noblest, then we are stating something vague, and that marks the dusk of consciousness and of criticism, as if talking about colours when blind.”⁹

Concomitant with formulating this view, Henszlmann made a revolutionary move when he excluded the aesthetic category of *beautiful* from his system of norms,¹⁰ thereby foregrounding the vital aspect of objectivity. In *Parallel* and *Hellenic Tragedy* Henszlmann was gradually developing his system of norms that enabled normative evaluation. Both theoretical works may be considered documents of the development of evaluating norms from an important period in the Hungarian history of literature and culture from the 1840s, contesting the practice of Bajza and *Athenaeum* that characterised criticism at that time. The fundamental method of Henszlmann’s formation of norms, carried out in both studies, were constant comparison: the comparative analysis of processes in literature and fine arts, as well as of various works, cultures and eras. Description and comparison, continuous evaluation, resulting in the formation of the critical norms that function as the basis of normative evaluation, are the characteristic features of Henszlmann’s criticism in theory and practice.

The main foundation of Henszlmann’s system of norms is the criterion of the *characteristic*, both in literature and fine arts, for the sake of developing Hungary’s own

⁸ DÁVIDHÁZI 1992, 43.

⁹ HENSZLMANN 1842d, 602.

¹⁰ “Henszlmann contrasted ‘beautiful’ with ‘characteristic’ and ‘vital,’ and set ‘individual’ and ‘national’ against ‘ideal.’” GYULAI 1914, 415.

national arts, literature and culture. The norms professed in *Parallel* called for the formation of unique works of art, that is, the production of art through uniquely national stylistic characteristics (*characteristic*) and the replication of animate Nature (*vital*), as well as the criterion of functional appropriateness (*expedient*). In his dramatic theory, Henszlmann studied the norm of the *characteristic* most thoroughly: polemising with Bajza, Henszlmann was the first to proclaim the priority of elaborate characterisation in drama in the early 1840s, thereby abandoning the Aristotelian tradition of plot-centredness, and denoting artistic-aesthetic experience and its impact on tastes and preferences as the main tasks of tragedy. The system of rules set up by Henszlmann are linked to the Aristotelian notion of mimesis by the thesis that any work of art is an imitation of Nature, rather than the product of a free creative mind. On the other hand, the specific criterion of *expedient*, set at the very centre of Henszlmann's system of norms, pervading his way of thinking and asserted in every relation with regards to the author and the subject matter of a work, as well as the method of portrayal, appears to be the antecedent of the Romantic cult of individuality. In this respect Henszlmann seemingly followed the lead of German aesthetes and critics – A. W. Schlegel, Lessing – especially, Joseph Daniel Böhm. Henszlmann complemented the *characteristic* with the criterion of the *national characteristic*, and thus he joined the program of building national culture prevalent in the period. Henszlmann consciously strove to be part of the program and to influence it.

And what fate was awaiting Henszlmann's system of evaluative norms? The contemporaries that were determinative of the Hungarian literary and cultural world of the period did give references to some of his works and views, but he had to endure criticism and mockery even in his lifetime. For a long time after his death, his work in literary and drama theory was barely acknowledged in discourse on literary history, and a deeper understanding and appreciation of his merits came much later. Finding out the reason for this phenomenon may only be attempted by bearing several aspects in mind.

Henszlmann's encyclopaedic knowledge and way of looking at things may have collided with his ambition as a critic to build a nation: his foreign sources and the system based on this foundation elicited aversion and, at times, an inferiority complex in his contemporaries. As Bajza wrote about Henszlmann in *Athenaeum*, “Mr Henszlmann himself must have learnt in Germany a hatred for the French, only because the Germans hate them”¹¹ and “it seems that Mr Henszlmann spent so much time living in Germany that he internalized a hatred for the French; there is not one drop of blood in his veins that is not filled with loathing for the

¹¹ BAJZA 1842, 587.

French.”¹²

The revolution and the war of independence halted every cultural process, while the numb period between the failure of the revolution and the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 was characterised by an atmosphere of anguish and fear. Péter Dávidházi summarises the operation and situation of critical norms and the perception of literature in the era the following way: “[W]e must bring order to the ways things are by limitations, whatever they may be, because by their very nature they have an alarming inclination to break loose and, when left to themselves, they become chaotic and get out of control – even the disciplining force of what we understand to be a faulty measure, relatively valid and applied temporarily, is better than that.”¹³ This means that everything generated fear, especially the prospect of this process getting out of control, which could have been made highly possible by arts and literature. Romanticism is the art of individuality, the cult of the genius, and it was identified with a slackening of the structure of artistic creation and an enhancement the imagery of language – that is, it makes way for everything that is “out of control.” All this was rigorously rejected, since “even the worst government is better than anarchy,” claimed Pál Gyulai in 1861 – even the worst critique is better if it has principles and is temperate than any other critique that lacks principles and is illogical in its measures.¹⁴ The problem was that Henszlmann’s *characteristic* and the criterion of artistic-poetic characterisation in drama theory, as well as his cult of Shakespeare tended right towards Romanticism. Consequently, the system of norms set by the drama critic was not acceptable or deployable after the revolution. The tasks undertaken by literature took a different direction; there was a need to answer different questions concerning literary and critical thought. In the 1840s what mattered was the dramatic effect drama had on the audience, while after 1848 the most crucial task was to determine the nature of tragedy and the tragic aspect of drama. The processes that started to evolve in Hungarian literature after 1867 considerably transcended Henszlmann’s theses.

Finally, there is a biographical fact – perceivable as both a cause and an effect – that after the Revolution, in the 1950s, Henszlmann went abroad on a study trip, spent a few years in London and was building his career as an architect there, that is, he left the Hungarian literary world. He returned to Hungary in the 1860s, due to the building of the palace hosting the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. After his return, he again joined in Hungarian public life but he did not continue his literary activities, opting for working as an architect, art historian and

¹² BAJZA 1842, 598.

¹³ DÁVIDHÁZI 1992, 76, 77–84.

¹⁴ GYULAI 1908c, 385, quoted in DÁVIDHÁZI, 1992, 76.

the forefather of art conservation in Hungary instead.

It must be noted, though, that Henszlmann summarised his revolutionary norms in a perfectly orderly system with confines and limits. Mimesis, the notion of imitating Nature, does not transcend Classicism, which means that it does not really borrow the Romanticist thesis of creative imagination. Nevertheless, Henszlmann did utilize and incorporate in his system several expectations and norms of (especially German) Romanticism, such as the portrayal of the individual, the characteristic and the peculiar, a turning back not to antiquity but to the past in general, and the specific preference of Gothic art (fine arts) and Shakespeare's art (drama). Henszlmann was the first to collect Hungarian folk tales and compare them to those of other cultures,¹⁵ which meant that instead of the ancient he marked Hungarian mythological themes as the subject matter of art, and he initiated the incorporation of the texts of folk tales and legends in Hungarian national works – this is also a Romanticist feature.

Henszlmann's significance in the history of Hungarian criticism does not lie in the quality and classification of his norms or the system built of them, but primarily in the gesture itself: in employing *the evaluative formation of norms* and *normative evaluation*. In her monograph about János Erdélyi, Ilona T. Erdélyi makes the following observation with regards to *A Review of Hungarian Literature* and Erdélyi's principles as a critic: "using the 'principle of the individual,' the notion of the *characteristic*, [János Erdélyi] popularised a new poetic ideal which – as opposed to the exaggeration employed by the *ideal* – pointed in the direction of the concrete, that is, the portrayal of reality."¹⁶ This also indicates that by consistently developing and rigorously using his critical norms,¹⁷ Henszlmann – apparently – was one of the first critics to have an impact on the normative evaluation applied by Erdélyi and his contemporaries. "Henszlmann was the first to advocate the slogans of modern criticism in Hungary, and he did it with success, as our poetry had already started to turn away from the rigid ideals of Classicism. János Erdélyi applied Henszlmann's notions in their cohesive system in Hungarian literature,"¹⁸ claimed Pál Gyulai in his commemorative address, drawing on which it may be stated that Henszlmann's method of criticism became paradigmatic:¹⁹ János Erdélyi's

¹⁵ GYULAI 1914, 415.

¹⁶ T. ERDÉLYI 2015, 197.

¹⁷ In connection with this, Ilona T. Erdélyi also notes that the reason why *A Review of Hungarian Literature* could only be published for a year is that "the Hungarian literary world was not able to provide enough materials to write about, as instead of catering for the interests and tastes of the masses, the editors strove to mould and educate the shallow audience." T. ERDÉLYI 2015, 197.

¹⁸ GYULAI 1914, 415.

¹⁹ János Korompay H. discusses this issue in his study summarising the critiques written about Petőfi's oeuvre and concludes that the system of norms created by Henszlmann paved the way for the reception of Petőfi's works. KOROMPAY 1992, 1–23.

study about Berzsenyi²⁰ and Vörösmarty,²¹ as well as his critical review and normative evaluation of János Arany's *Zrínyi és Tasso* [Zrínyi and Tasso] and *Bulcsú Károly költeményei* [Károly Bulcsú's Poems]²² could not have come to life without Henszlmann's revolutionary work.²³

²⁰ “Thus the new aesthetics took a step back and, instead of explaining the beautiful, it expounded the tools and methods that could most certainly facilitate the production of the beautiful, such as the *characteristic* and the *unique*”. ERDÉLYI 1991, 147.

²¹ “What is it then that makes drama a genre so close to real life? The answer is: the fact that we must create man in drama just as he is created in real life: individually, that is, *with character*.” ERDÉLYI 1991, 99.

²² ARANY 1975, 644–662.

²³ “Besides the traditions transmitted to Arany we may also mention [...] the works of Imre Henszlmann, who was frequently quoted by Greguss and whose writings Arany knew well – at least according to János Korompay H.'s research on the individual and the ideal.” BALOGH 2017, 427.

IV. List of publications related to the topic of the dissertation

KAPUSI Angéla, *Imre Henszlmann's Role as a Drama Critic in Hungarian Literary History* = V. Interdiszciplináris Doktorandusz Konferenciakötet: 5th Interdisciplinary Doctoral Conference Conference Book, szerk. ÁCS Kamilla, BENCZE Noémi, BÓDOG Ferenc, HAFFNER Tamás, HEGYI Dávid, HORVÁTH Orsolya Melinda, HÜBER Gabriella Margit, KIS KELEMEN Bence, LAJKÓ Adrienn, MÁTYÁS Mónika, SZENDI Anna, SZILÁGYI Tamás Gábor, Pécs, Pécsi Tudományegyetem Doktorandusz Önkormányzat, 2016, 216–228.

KAPUSI Angéla, *Korát megelőzve?: Henszlmann Imre Shakespeare-kritikái és a magyarországi Shakespeare-recepció a 19. század közepén*, Valóság, 2016/8, 45–51.

KAPUSI Angéla, „Ő tehát: szépész, régész, építész”: *Egy ellentmondásos pályakép: Henszlmann Imre* = Publicationes Universitatis Miskolcensis Secto Philosophica, 2016/1, 166–178.

KAPUSI Angéla, „nem elég többé, valamit csak éreznünk a' művészetben, hanem egyszersmind tudnunk is kell”: *Henszlmann Imre drámaelmélete és –kritikája = A szövegtől a szcenikáig: Tanulmányok a dráma- és színháztörténet köréből*, (Régi Magyar Színház 6.), szerk. CZIBULA Katalin, DEMETER Júlia, PINTÉR Márta Zsuzsanna, Eger, Líceum Kiadó, 2016, 620–635.

KAPUSI Angéla, *Henszlmann Imre és Bécs = Doktoranduszok Fóruma, Miskolc, 2015. november 19.*, szerk. FEKETE Norbert, MAJOR Ágnes, Miskolc, Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 2016, 21–27.

KAPUSI Angéla, *Henszlmann Imre nézetei a művészképzésről és a műkritikai gyakorlatról = Elitek nevelése és oktatása: Esetek és összefüggések a 18–20. századból*, szerk. KAPUSI Angéla, UGRAI János, Bp., Új Mandátum Kiadó, 43–54.

KAPUSI Angéla, „*vox clamantis in deserto*” – *Henszlmann Imre jellemzetesének recepciója. A kutatás lehetséges irányai = Határátlépések*, szerk. BARNA László, EGERER Lilla, KAPUSI Angéla, MAJOR Ágnes, Miskolc, 2015 (Pro Scientia Füzetek, 3), 39–46.

KAPUSI Angéla, *Henszlmann Imre mint drámakritikus = Doktoranduszok Fóruma, Miskolc, 2014. november 20.*, szerk. FEKETE Norbert, MAJOR Ágnes, Miskolc, Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 2015, 34–40.

KAPUSI Angéla, *A karakterisztikustól a jellemzetesig. Henszlmann Imre művészetelméletéről*, ItK, 2014/4, 540–546.

KAPUSI Angéla, *A korszak szava – Henszlmann Imre a művészeti nevelés gyakorlatáról*, Magyar Pedagógia, 114 (2014), 133–148.

KAPUSI Angéla, *A „jellemzetes”, az „eleven” és a „célirányos” fogalma Henszlmann Imre művészetelméletében = Doktoranduszok Fóruma, Miskolc, 2013. november 7.*, szerk. BARNA László, HUSZTI Tímea, Miskolc, Miskolci Egyetem Tudományszervezési és Nemzetközi Osztály, 2014, 42–47.

KAPUSI Angéla, *Henszlmann Imre: A hellen tragoedia tekintettel a keresztyén drámára = Sokszerű jelentés*, szerk. BARNA László, EGERER Lilla, KAPUSI Angéla, MAJOR Ágnes, Miskolc, 2013 (Pro Scientia Füzetek, 2), 48–55.