

The Black Piano through the Lense of
the Feminist Reader

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Abstract

The primary literary source I analyze is Katalin Baráth's novel, *The Black Piano*. I examine the book from the point of view of feminist reading, and my aim is to prove that the Hungarian feminist crime fiction is an existing genre in the Hungarian literature. My thesis has three chapters, which are the following: "The Place of the Black Piano in the Hungarian Literature", "»A Suitable Job for a Woman« or the Place of the Female Protagonist in the Detective Story" and "Reading the Body, Petting the Text, or the Relations of Text and Body in *The Black Piano*".

The first text of the thesis deals with the story of the Hungarian police and the amateur detective, showing that the historical, social and political background influenced the existence, or rather non-existence of the Hungarian crime fiction. Its existence was influenced mostly by the American and English detective stories, which reached the Hungarian readers through translations. The birth of *The Black Piano* must be strongly connected to the development of the Hungarian feminism and the reception of the feminist discourse by the elitist literature.

The second chapter keeps in focus the way in which Katalin Baráth created a new genre by following in a special way the formula of the classical detective fiction, and also "refreshing" it with new elements. My aim is to prove that the role of the detective is suitable for the feminist private eye, and the romantic elements do not threaten the genre.

The third page concentrates on the relation of body and text in *The Black Piano*, introducing in the feminist reading the concept of corporeal narratology. In the conclusion I prove that the Hungarian feminist crime fiction is a functional genre, and *The Black Piano* is in the same time entertaining and historically informative.

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Introduction

My thesis deals with Katalin Baráth's novel *The Black Piano*, which was first published in 2009, in private edition, and then in 2010 by Agave Könyvek (Agave Books). The title of my primary literary source is in an intertextual relation with Endre Ady's poem, *The Black Piano*¹, published in 1907, and the poem has a great importance in the story. Katalin Baráth was born in 1978, and she spent her childhood in Magyarkanizsa, where the plot of her novel takes place, but the name of the town has been changed during different historical periods, and in Baráth's text it is called Ókanizsa.

My aim is to prove that *The Black Piano*, as a Hungarian feminist crime fiction is an existing genre, and it is functional, even if it does not have a place in the Hungarian literary canon. Under the term "functional" I understand, that the book is well written, entertaining, historically informative, and is new in the way it is constructed, in comparison to the classical crime fiction. Before presenting the structure of my thesis and the methods I used for analysis, I would like to shortly summarize the plot of Katalin Baráth's text.

The plot takes place in Ókanizsa, at the beginning of the 1900. Veronika Dávid, the main protagonist of the book, later called Veron, works in a small bookshop, spending her days with reading literature and writing her own novel. She is an emancipated woman, adopting the feminist way of thinking. One day Vili, a mad boy, enters her shop, and dies with a knife in his back. Veron feels herself obliged to help the

¹ Endre Ady, "A fekete zongora", *Esti lap* 12, no. 167 (July 1907).
<http://mek.niif.hu/05500/05552/html/av0112.html> (accessed July 2, 2011).

authorities finding the murderer, while the number of dead people increases. The cause of the crime is the rivalry between two construction companies, a Hungarian and a Jewish one. The Hungarian architect wants to deflect the suspicion to the Jewish one, taking advantage of the anti-Semitic atmosphere of the period, and he covers the clues of the first crime with a series of other murders. Each of the killed people have in their pockets Endre Ady's poem, *The Black Piano*.

Veron, the captain of the local police, and the girl's friend, an old internist, together with a young soldier, try to find the criminal. Ákos, the soldier, colleague of the captain, and Veron fall in love with each other, but it turns out, that the former is the criminal. The main protagonist has to leave the town, because she was discovered spending the night with Ákos, which means, that she is not a respectable woman anymore.

She moves to Budapest, where she becomes a journalist at the feminist newspaper, The Woman. Veron continues writing, and living her life according to the feminist principles. She also meets Hercule Poirot, the famous detective, and they agree that the Hungarian mentality is not prepared for new ways of investigation, and accepting women as equal to men. The book offers a rich palette of ideas worth to analyze, which I would like to present in the following.

My thesis is composed of three chapters; these are "The Place of *The Black Piano* in the Hungarian Literature", "A Suitable Job for a Woman" and "Reading the Body, Petting the Text, or the Relations of Text and Body in *The Black Piano*".

In the first chapter I try to find the place of Katalin Baráth's novel in the Hungarian literary canon, taking in consideration the political, historical, social and

cultural background, which influenced the existence or rather non-existence of the Hungarian feminist crime fiction.

“The Place of *The Black Piano* in the Hungarian Literature” has several sub-chapters, which deal with the history of the Hungarian police and the detective; the development of the crime fiction in the country, due to the translations of detective novels made from English language, and several experimental writings; and feminism and feminist literature are also important factors for the birth of *The Black Piano*. I base my arguments on the secondary literary sources written by Krisztián Benyovszky, Bálint Varga and Éva Bánki: these authors deal with the story of the police and the detective in Hungary, and the development of the crime fiction as a genre in the country, while Judit Acsáry, Nóra Séllei and Márta Várnagyi focus on the history of the Hungarian feminism, and the attitude of the literary canon towards feminist literature.

The second chapter, “A Suitable Job for a Woman”, tries to show how the investigation is suitable not only for a woman, but also for a feminist woman; moreover, I want to prove that Katalin Baráth creates a completely new genre by adopting the formula of the classical crime fiction, and also introducing new elements in it. This chapter is built on the writings of: Krisztián Benyovszky, Gregory Kathleen Klein, John G. Cavetti, Patricia E. Johnson, Daniela Zeca and Merja Makinen. The above mentioned authors focus on the characteristics of the crime fiction and the feminist detective story, analyzing English, American and Hungarian novels. The third chapter is built on the second one, because offers another aspect of the feminist reading used previously.

In the chapter “Reading the Body, Petting the Text, or the Relations of Text and Body in *The Black Piano*” I concentrate on the relation between text and body in *The*

Black Piano, comparing the novel with the British film director's, Peter Greenaway's film, *The Pillow Book*, which also incorporates the idea of body/text relation. In my analysis I introduce the idea of corporeal narratology, which is very important from the feminist point of view. The secondary literary sources I use are the writings of Anna Kérchy, Ágnes Pethő and Krisztián Benyovszky. The thesis chapters are built on a series of question which occurred along the reading of *The Black Piano*.

The aim of my thesis is to answer the questions: What kind of way did the text have to follow in order to become a Hungarian feminist crime fiction? How did Katalin Baráth manage to create a new genre, and what are the significances of it? Moreover, how does the relation of text and body become important in the feminist crime fiction?

The method I use in order to answer the questions is the critical analysis of the above mentioned secondary literary sources. For the better understanding of my thesis I would like to keep in focus feminist literary analysis and cultural studies, and to explain what feminist reading is, based on Elizabeth Grosz' text, "Sexual Signatures: Feminism after the Death of the Author"². In her article Grosz tries to find an answer to what distinguishes a patriarchal writing from a feminist one. She makes a distinction between women's texts, feminine and feminist texts. This clarification is very important in the analysis of *The Black Piano*, because Katalin Baráth's novel is in the same time feminine, feminist and women's text. According to Grosz, it is women's text, because it is written by a female author, even if not necessarily published for an audience composed of women. It is feminine, because it is "written from the point of view of feminine

² Elizabeth Grosz, "Sexual Signatures: Feminism after the Death of the Author", *Space, Time and Perversion* (New York and London: Routledge): 9-24.

experience"³, and it is a feminist text, because "self-consciously challenges the methods, objects, goals or principles of mainstream patriarchal canons"⁴. In the chapters of the thesis I will argue how *The Black Piano* deals with feminine experience, and how it challenges the methods, goals or principles of mainstream patriarchal canon. The method I used in the analysis of the novel is feminist reading, concept defined by Elizabeth Grosz in the following way: "Any text can be read from a feminist point of view, that is, from the point of view that brings out a text's alignment with, participation in, and subversion of patriarchal norms."⁵

³Elizabeth Grosz, "Sexual Signatures: Feminism after the Death of the Author", *Space, Time and Perversion*, New York and London: Routledge.

⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵ Ibid., 16.

The Place of *The Black Piano* in the Hungarian Literature

“Some of the critique circles and elitist organs will despise my books and my talents, even if I write better crime fictions than *The Black Piano*. If this happens because I have chosen Arthur Conan Doyle’s, Agatha Christie’s and Steven Saylor’s genre, then no problem, I won’t be disappointed.”⁶

(Katalin Baráth)

The aim of this chapter is to show the long way the Hungarian fiction had to proceed until it reached to the point where the reader could open the second Hungarian feminist detective novel: the first was Nina Stein’s “*Katalin’s Daughters*”⁷ (Nina Stein, alias Andrea Pető; *Katalin leányai*), published in 2009. The first time *The Black Piano*⁸ was also published in 2009 in a private edition, and secondly, in 2010, by the Agave books.

The citation is taken from an interview made with the writer of *The Black Piano*, Katalin Baráth, and contains useful information about a book I consider important from several points of view, and which I would like to analyze in my thesis. The quotation emphasizes what the interviewer Tímea Kovács claims during the discussion with the writer, that in Hungary there exists a sharp distinction between the canonized literature and the entertaining one. The former is considered “indigestible”, while the latter is seen without quality. Why would Hungarian critics despise someone who writes in the genre of Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie? Why did somebody decide still to create crime fiction? And finally, why do I consider *The Black Piano* a precious writing, even if it doesn’t have a

⁶ Interview made by Tímea Kovács, <http://ekultura.hu/olvasnivalo/egyeb.html>, (accessed May 15, 2011).

⁷ Nina Stein, *Katalin leányai*, Budapest: Athenaeum, 2009.

⁸ Katalin Baráth, *A fekete zongora*, Budapest: Agave könyvek, 2010.

place in the literary canon? I want to find the place of Baráth Katalin's book in the Hungarian literature: if the book cannot exist inside the so called elite literature, it has several reasons I will present in the following.

In order to understand the importance of the novel *The Black Piano* by Katalin Baráth in the Hungarian literature, I have to analyze the texts of several authors. The writings of Tibor Keszthelyi, Bálint Varga and Éva Bánki will help us to see, that a feminist crime novel written by a woman writer and having a female main character is a rare phenomenon in a country where the crime fiction is not a popular genre. Tibor Keszthelyi, Bálint Varga and Éva Bánki worked like detectives to find the Hungarian crime novel, the Hungarian detective, while I worked to detect their texts, because the genre has a very poor bibliography. The reason why only few scholars wanted to reflect on the detective novels is, that, as I have mentioned before, crime fiction doesn't belong to the elitist literature.

If I want to find the place of *The Black Piano* in the Hungarian literature, first I have to answer the question about the situation of the Hungarian crime novel: this answer needs a brief analysis of the historical, the political, the social and the cultural background. The existence of the feminist crime fiction in Hungary depends on many factors: the history of the police and the presence of the detective in the country; the reception of the British and American crime stories; the experiments of the Hungarian writers to create in the genre. Moreover, the feminist crime fiction cannot be separated from the Hungarian feminist literature, and in an indirect way, from the Hungarian feminism. These are political, historical, social and cultural factors, and the aim of this chapter is to present them with the help of the existing bibliography, and to prove, that in spite of the existing

difficulties, the Hungarian feminist crime fiction is a functional genre. Under "functional" I mean that *The Black Piano* is a good book: as she confessed in the interview made by Tímea Kovács, Katalin Baráth created her novel following the classical formula of the detective fiction, but she added to it something more. About the new, fresh elements inserted in the classical formula of the detective fiction I will discuss in the next chapter of my thesis.

1. The Police and the Detective in Hungary

First of all, I would like to concentrate on the existence of the police and the detective in Hungary, because the crime novel cannot be separated from these state organs. Bálint Varga dedicated an article “Nyomozás az első magyar krimi után”⁹ (Detecting the First Hungarian Crime), and a whole book *Magádetektívek*¹⁰ to the subject, claiming that „it is problematic to talk about crime fiction in a country where the prestige, effectiveness and the methods of the police do not match the requirements of the period, which, so to say, are not high”¹¹. The period he refers to is the middle of the 19th. The word “police” first appeared in the language of the law in 1840. Varga presents the existence of the Hungarian police by keeping in focus both the political and the historical background of the time. In 1848 Bertalan Szemere was the person who established the police by using a Parisian model. He wanted to reorganize it, but there was no time left, because the Austrians entered the country, and took over the tasks of the police. The first captain of the police protecting the population of Pest was Elek Thais, notorious for his

⁹ Bálint Varga, “Nyomozás az első magyar krimi után”, *Lepipálva. Tanulmányok a krimiről*, eds. Benyovszki, Krisztián, H. Nagy, Péter (Budapest: Lilium Aurum, 2009): 50-75.

¹⁰ Bálint Varga, *Magádetektívek*, Budapest: Agave könyvek, 2005.

¹¹ Bálint Varga, “Nyomozás az első magyar krimi után”, *Lepipálva. Tanulmányok a krimiről*, eds. Benyovszki, Krisztián, H. Nagy, Péter (Budapest: Lilium Aurum, 2009): 61.

corruption and working with prostitutes. The Austrians reformed the police making it a secret organ working with spies. The first independent Hungarian police was established in 1881. Authors did not like policemen as main protagonists in their novels, because first they did not exist, then because they did not gain any respect from the population. And now I would like to examine the situation of the detective.

The “story” of the detective is a very interesting one, because it didn’t have a serious tradition in the Hungarian culture. The first detective department in Budapest was established in 1885. One can understand why the Hungarian crime fiction was an almost unknown genre in the literary life, if we think about the fact that the first detective department in Hungary was only two years “older” than the appearance of Conan Doyle’s protagonist, Sherlock Holmes, who was “introduced” to the public in 1887. In his book, *Magándetektívek*¹², Bálint Varga dedicates a whole chapter to the development of the Hungarian detective.

The name and the title of the detectives were official, fact which means that in Hungary amateur detectives did not exist for a long time. The writer of the article argues that before the First World War those officials who dealt with the problems of the private sphere and business life were called “private researchers”. “The first decree in Hungary (135.585/1913.BM) which referred to the activity of the private detective was published only in 1914.”¹³, writes Varga, warning the readers that this decree didn’t have a long life, because it was erased by the Hungarian Soviet Republic. In 1923 a new decree was elaborated, which meant that the activity of the amateur detective was strongly controlled by the state organs. Ironically, Bálint Varga acts like a detective in the research after the

¹² Bálint Varga, *Magándetektívek*, Budapest: Agave könyvek, 2005.

¹³ Ibid., 44.

Hungarian detective, but he admits renunciatively that even after a brief research he couldn't find a private detective whose name is worth mentioning. From 1925 the situation changes, because some of the wellknown detectives of the period start to publish in the "Detektív Szemle" (Detective Review), which later becomes "Magyar Detektív" (Hungarian Detective); these detectives are the following: Vladimir Székely, József Tuna and Ede Gellért; but they do not work on their own, but they belong to the Hungarian police. To the surprise of the reader, Varga claims that the police of the period corresponded to the world standard, but the crimes committed were not complicated enough, so the "personal researchers" did not really have cases to work on. In the '30s the police became an organization of political violence: they prosecuted Jews, the so called enemies of the era, journalists and writers, publishers. In the Horthy-period (1919-1944) the job of the private detective became a despised activity, because the state organs wanted to include the detectives in their services through blackmail or payola. From 1949 to 1977 private investigation was considered illegal.

The story of István Fazekas is a very interesting and contradictory one, because in 1981 he opened his office "Pinkerton Personal Investigator", but he was denounced because of unfaithful behaviour towards the state: one of his letters sent through the post office (!) was caught, and it was discovered that he made offensive claims against the Soviet Union. Sending such letters through the post office was not an intelligent behavior from a detective, so the first and only private detective of the Hungarian Socialism was incriminated.

The story of the Hungarian private investigator is really shocking, because only in 1994 was elaborated the IV.th decree which affirmed that practically everybody can become a

private investigator, if s/he gets a licence from the police, but which gives no education. Today there exist from six to eight hundred offices and private investigators who work on their own, and Bálint Varga drives one's attention on the fact that the result of the interviews made with these detectives shows that the majority of them were in the service of the secret police. These organs did not manage obtaining the respect of the public, while they served the interest of the state and not of the people. If being a police man or a private investigator was not a respectable condition, how could they have become the main protagonits of crime novels, and the favourit characters of the readers?

2. The first Experiments to Write Hungarian Crime Fiction

After we saw the historical and socio-political causes which influenced the developement of the Hungarian crime fiction, we can analyze the data of literary history, in order to discover the works which lead to the first Hungarian crime fiction. In the next part of this chapter I would like to examine the works of Éva Bánki, Krisztián Benyovszky, Bálint Varga and Tibor Keszthelyi, because these authors made a brief research in the subject. It is important to know what were the antecedents of the American and English crime fiction, because this genre begins with American and English writers; then we will find out the reception of these books in the Hungarian literature, and the antecedents of the first Hungarian crime fiction.

2.1. Pitaval, Fantastic Short Story, Secret Novel

In his book *Bevezetés a krimi olvasásába*¹⁴ Krisztiány Benyovszky quotes

Karel Čapek, who defines the essence of the genre:

“The most important motifs of the crime fiction are the research and the punishment of the perpetrator. Both of them are rooted in some ancient human instincts and drives: the former can be connected to the will to solve the unknown mysteries, while the latter to the usefulness of the punishment of criminals.”[□]

These two motifs are essential for the crime fiction, as well as for those writings which lead to its development. Benyovszky argues that even if Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849) was considered the creator of the crime fiction, there are some other texts which can be read like crime stories: *The Tales of the One Thousand and One Nights*, the story of Cain and Abel etc. He considers that the most important antecedent of the crime novel is the pitaval. This genre was created by Francois Gayot de Pitaval (1673-1743), a French lawyer, who published more than a hundred crime reports. His followers were Dumas, Hugo, Balzac etc. The pitaval is considered essential for crime fiction because this is the first type of writing in the center of which we can find the sin. The pitaval is a true crime story, which has a different structure than the crime novel: the narration follows the chronology, the perpetrator is known from the beginning, and the accent falls on the punishment of the criminal. There are also some other genres which contributed to the birth of the crime fiction: these are the fantastic short story and the secret-novel. The fantastic short story deals with the strange, the mysterious, and the occult elements are used in order to contribute to the atmosphere of the writing. Fantastic short stories were written by Poe and also by Arthur Conan Doyle. The secret-novel was frequent in the

¹⁴ Krisztián Benyovszky, *Bevezetés a krimi olvasásába*, Dunaszerdahely: Lilium Aurum könyvek, 2007.

¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

'40s of the nineteenth century; the most famous writers were Eugen Sue (1804-1857) and Charles Dickens (1812-1870).

The genres which contributed to the birth of the American and English crime novels are the pitaval, the fantastic short story and the secret-novel. Before we examine what kind of works were the antecedents of the Hungarian detective story, we should firstly check when the first translations were made in the Hungarian literature, because even if our authors were unskillful in the genre, the readers were very cultivated. As Bálint Varga claims in his work *Magándetektívek*, the American and English crime stories reached to more than three hundred thousand readers in Hungary.

2.2 Hungarian Translations of Crime Fiction

Edgar Allen Poe is the father of the crime fiction, and his work "Murders in the Rue Morgue" is considered the first writing of the genre, this texts reached firstly to the Hungarian readers. According to the *Lexicon of Universal Literature*¹⁶ the first translation was made by Kálmán Mikszáth in 1841, entitled "Rejtélyes gyilkosság", which corresponds to the translation "Mysterious murder". The second translation was made by Pásztor Á. in 1875 and the translation corresponds to the original title "A Morgue utcai kettős gyilkosság" (Murder in the Rue Morgue).

The second well known crime fiction writer whose works were translated in Hungarian was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. His texts were translated by T. Lándor, K. Tábori, A. Adorján and Gy. Komor between 1900 and 1908. The Hungarian version of the title did

¹⁶ *Világirodalmi lexikon*, II. Kötet, Budapest: Akadémia kiadó, 1972.

not correspond to the original “Doktor Holmes kalandjai” (The Adventures of Doctor Holmes).

From 1920 the writings of Agatha Christie were published annually, and the first translation was made in 1926 by A. Zigány, this text is “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd”. Translations were published in 1940, 1941, 1952, 1953 and 1968, fact which shows the great popularity of the writer among the Hungarian readers.

I have to mention another author whose novels were accepted with pleasure in Hungary: this is Ellery Queen (his real name is Frederich Dannay). His first translation was made by János Molnár in 1930. The text was “The French Powder Mystery”, but the title did not correspond to the original: “Valami történt az áruházban” (Something happened in the Market). The existence of the early translations show that the crime fiction was a very popular genre for the Hungarian readers; as one can read in Bálint Varga’s article “Nyomozás az első magyar krimi után” (Research for the First Hungarian Crime Fiction), the favorite topic of the literature is *sin*, because people like to read about it. But the Hungarian authors had great difficulties in following the American and English masters. In the following sub-chapter I would like to concentrate on the birth of the first Hungarian crime fiction, around which there exist some disagreements between the authors who made researches in the subject. The first Hungarian detective story lead in an indirect way to the birth of The Black Piano.

2.3. *The Antecedents of the Hungarian Crime Fiction*

Bálint Varga's article is a very important writing, because the author recognizes that the Hungarian crime fiction is like the Hungarian orange¹⁷: "it is a little bit sour, it is a little bit yellow, but it belongs to us"¹⁸. In the text the author gives very useful information about the writers, who tried to produce crime fiction, but somehow they only managed to do something else, because in the Hungarian mentality the ethical motif which lead to the committing of the deed is not really important; the criminal's rank is almost equal with the detective's, and the happy-end schema is obligatory.

Ignác Nagy wrote the first text in which the crime is democratic: everybody can become a criminal. He followed Eugene Sue's model, and between 1844-1845 twelve copybooks with the title Magyar titkok, (Hungarian Secrets); obviously he did not write real crime fiction, but he contributed to the birth of the genre in the Hungarian literature. In the following years (1846-1847) Lajos Kuthy published Hazai rejtelmek (Mysteries from home), but Bálint Varga is critical with the text, considering that it cannot be accepted like a crime story, it is rather a gothic fiction, while he points out that his opinion is in contrast with that of Elemér Hankiss, who received the Mysteries as a real crime fiction. Year after year works were published which hardly met the standard. For example, in 1847 Miklós Jósika published the Egy kétemeletes ház (A House with two Floors), and the book contains some crime, but hardly a detective and a research. Varga thinks, that it is like a romantic story. The Secrets of Budapest is another try by József Kiss, using the pseudonym Rudolf Szentesi, but the book published in 1873 is only a so called "sin-novel". From 1890 good textbooks are published by the police which influence the birth

¹⁷Péter Bacsó, A tanú (The Witness), 1969. The Hungarian orange is an important motif in Bacsó's film. The orange about which Varga talks, in reality is a lemon.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0065067/usercomments.html> (accessed May 1, 2011).

¹⁸Péter Bacsó, A tanú (The Witness), 1969.

of the crime. Varga mentions the *Rendőrségi lexikon* (Police Encyclopaedia) by Miklós Rédey, and the *Rendőrközegek tankönyve* (Policemen's textbook) from 1906. Varga emphasizes the fact, that the sin became democratic: everybody could be a perpetrator: if this was not so before, it meant that the majority of the readers were people from the middle class who did not like to read about the blaming of their class. The writers were obliged to serve the taste of the readers if they wanted their books to be sold.

Kornél Tábori and Vladimir Székely, the heads of the journalistic department of the police, established the principles of newspaper writing about investigations. They published the periodicals *Bűnös Budapest* (Sinner Budapest) from 1908, but they still did not write crime fiction. The reader becomes enthusiastic, like Bálint Varga was, when he discovered Gyula Déry's writing *Sírbolt a bálteremben (egy magándetektív naplója)*, (Crypt in the Ball Room: the Diary of a Personal Investigator), but this book, too, is something else that we have expected: not crime fiction, but a documentary, a historical novel based on facts.

In his article "Research after the first Hungarian Crime Fiction" Bálint Varga summarizes the most important mistake of the above mentioned novels:

„A good crime fiction is considered to be good because the victim's death is a real loss, which caused the imbalance of the world's morality. This imbalance can only be fixed by the detective. The mistake of the novels of the period is not only that the plot takes place in the past, but also that the writers use the crime as a tool for telling a story which on its own would be weak. The sin becomes weightless, the death meaningless, and the research without reason.”¹⁹

Varga finally finds the first Hungarian crime fiction writer: the lawyer Dr. Soma Gúthy.

It seems that opinions differ around the question who the first Hungarian crime fiction

¹⁹ Bálint Varga, "Nyomozás az első magyar krimi után", *Lepipálva. Tanulmányok a krimiről*, eds. Benyovszki, Krisztián, H. Nagy, Péter (Budapest: Lilium Aurum, 2009).

writer was. In his book *A detektívtörténet anatómiája*²⁰ (The Anatomy of the Crime Fiction), Tibor Keszthelyi emphasizes that even if she wrote in English, and published in London, and her writings reached to the readers in Hungary through translations, the first Hungarian crime fiction writer was Emma Orczy (1865-1947), the creator of the Pimpernet series. Her books were translated by the following famous writers: Babits, Karinthy, Schöpflin etc.

Keszthelyi reminds us a very important information, that for the writers of the period (the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 18th) it was essential to use English pseudonyms. Sándor Béla Bakk used the pen names Garry Tex and A.G. Murphy; László György was D. Crabble, and Tamás Moly published under the name of C. Roy. Those who contributed to the “reveille” of the genre István Gyula Révész (1910-1970) and László András (1919-). Keszthelyi dedicates a chapter in his book to the detective stories during the Socialism, but before analyzing this period, we have to concentrate on several other factors in the literary life of Hungary that influenced the detective novels.

The Hungarian crime fiction was influenced by some juristic issues: it may seem unbelievable, but the great crime cases were missing from the Hungarian life. There were only few criminals, and the majority of them killed because of jealousy. The less serious crimes were reported by the newspapers, because, as I have mentioned before, the readers liked the sin. But those who wrote pulp fiction did it because of two reasons: they liked to write, because they could produce a huge quantity in a short time (the quantity was important, and not the quality); or they were obliged to write in order to gain their existence. They published “yellow books”²¹, something which indicated, that the novel

²⁰Tibor Keszthelyi, *A detektívtörténet anatómiája*, Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1979.

²¹<http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.php.html> (accessed May 3, 2011).

was cheap and valueless. “Yellow book” is a translation from the Italian word “giallo”, which referred to a 20th century genre of literature and film; the word refers to crime fiction and mystery. The books were cheap novels with yellow covers. One can see, there existed a great quantity of writings containing some crime and spy stories, but the *Nyugat* (1908-1941) strictly “guarded” the quality. Bálint Varga affirms with some bitter humour, that even if in such conditions somebody have had decided to write crime fiction, s/he would have provoked the anger of gods. Well, those gods were the journalist of the *Nyugat*, which was a serious organ that influenced the taste of the public. The *Nyugat*, considered to be the highest quality literary newspaper of the time, refused to publish Agatha Christie’s, Stanley Gardner’s and Conan Doyle’s text. The only article about Conan Doyle appered in the *Nyugat* in his memory, after his death, published by Aladár Schöfflin in the second number of the year 1938. They did not even accept Poe’s crime fictions, however they liked his other writings. The *Nyugat* accepted critical writings about crime novels, and only Tamás Moly’s book, the *Vörösbegy* was published, because Moly worked for the above mentioned newspaper.

In her writing “A meghalni nem tudó bűn. Hard-boiled hagyomány a magyar irodalomban”²² (The Sin which cannot Die. Hard-boiled Tradition in the Hungarian Literature), Éva Bánki draws one’s attention on a really interesting phenomenon: a text by Dezső Kosztolányi, member of the *Nyugat*, who deals with the topic crime fiction, but in an unusual way. It is a short story about Gallus, the translator, who needs a job. He is given a crime fiction to translate it from English into Hungarian. Gallus is not a respected person, that’s why he gets a despised job: the attitude of the main protagonist who gives

²² Éva Bánki, “A meghalni nem tudó bűn. Hard-boiled hagyomány a magyar irodalomban” *Napút*, 12. no. 5 (June 2010): 67-79.

Gallus the work, shows the mentality of the period related to the crime fiction: “we translate it, but we put on gloves in order to protect our hands from it”²³. Gallus translates the books, but he “steals” the objects (land, money and treasure) mentioned in the text. Obviously, his deed is discovered: correcting and checking the translation becomes the investigation, and the publisher who analyzes the writing is the detective, who discovers the theft. Éva Bánki considers that this short story is the first Hungarian detective story which diverts up the formula of the traditional crime fiction.

In the following I would like to use Tibor Keszthelyi’s, Bálint Varga’s and Éva Bánki’s works, because these authors deal with the Hungarian crime fiction during the Socialism, period which did not contribute to the development of the genre.

2.4. Crime Fiction in the Socialist Hungary

As we already know, the amateur detective had a very difficult existence in Hungary, especially during the Socialism, where the investigations were made by the state organs, and this influenced also the literary life. In the European Socialist countries (between the years ’50-’60) the crime fiction did not have a place in the literature. Bálint Varga argues that the crime fictions written after 1945 served as a tool for the Socialist propaganda. Writings which had a main protagonist who was a detective, were forbidden. András Berkesi wrote some adventure and spy stories after the Socialist taste; Rudolf Szamos published his Kántor-stories from 1971, as well as László L. Lőrinc (1983), who used the pseudonym Leslie L. Lawrence. In the chapter “A szocialista magyar krimi” (The Hungarian Socialist Crime Fiction), Bálint Varga claims with some humor, that:

²³ Dezső Kosztolányi, *Novellái* II. kötet (Budapest: Révai, 1943):234.

“the cultural politics was obliged to restrict the number of foreign books, because it was not fair, that from Agatha Christie’s books were sold double or triple more, than from the Hungarian Soviet writers’ .“²⁴ Literary critics did not want to accept the Hungarian crime fiction writers, and even the film directors despised the genre. Such writers like Péter Lux, Pál Bodor, György Szita or Dezső Tandori (having the pseudonym Nat Roid) worked only as the epigones of foreign authors, or tried to develop some new but not really successful styles. It seems that depending on the text and the authors of the bibliography dealing with crime fiction, the name of the first Hungarian crime fiction writer always changes. At least Bálint Varga and Éva Bánki agree in the question that Sándor Tar managed to publish the first Hungarian crime fiction *Szürke galamb* (Grey Pigeon), which is a good work. It is worth mentioning, that Sándor Tar²⁵ admitted in 1999, that from 1978 he worked as a spy for the III/III. department (Hungarian secret police).

Éva Bánki warns the readers that the heyday of the Hungarian hard-boiled stories coincided with the politicization of the crime novels: “The individualistic character of the fight between the detective and the criminal had to be changed according to the more deterministic character of the socialist human model.”²⁶ She criticizes Bertalan Mág, considering him a primitive, talentless writer, who falsified the history, and he only managed to create a specific Hungarian type through the figure of the detective. Bánki believes, that the most serious error in the East-European crime fictions is, that the secret and the taboo is not the sexuality, but the national history. She also mentions a hard-

²⁴ Bálint Varga, *Magádetektívek* (Budapest: Agave könyvek, 2005): 305.

²⁵ http://kulturport.hu/tart/cikk/f/0/92136/1/kultura/70_eves_lenne_a_mi_utcan_kugynokmultu_iroja.html (accessed May 3, 2011).

²⁶ Éva Bánki, “A meghalni nem tudó bűn. Hard-boiled hagyomány a magyar irodalomban” *Napút*, 12. no. 5 (June 2010): 67-79.

boiled writer who published in 2008: this is Vilmos Kondor, writing the historical crime fiction *The Noir of Budapest*, but we do not really know what happened in the literary life after the Socialism. In the previous sub-chapters I clarified the situation of the Hungarian crime fiction, but before considering the Hungarian feminist crime fiction, I want to concentrate on feminist movements in the country, because they cannot be separated from the reception of feminist literature, which obviously influenced the existence of *The Black Piano*.

3. *Feminism in Hungary*

The existence of the Hungarian feminist crime fiction cannot be separated from the Hungarian Feminism and the Hungarian feminist literature. Presenting the history of the Hungarian Feminism is important, because the main protagonist of *The Black Piano* is a feminist young girl, who, after finding the murderer, and establishing the destroyed order in her town, she goes to Budapest to work as a journalist at a feminist newspaper. Moreover, the plot of the novel takes place in the early 1900, which corresponds to the period of feminist struggles in the country.

In order to find the place of *The Black Piano* in the Hungarian literature, I would like to shortly present Judit Acsády's, Nóra Séllei's, Györgyi Horváth's and Márta Várnagyi's texts.

In her book "A hazai feminizmus fénykora" (The Heydays of the Hungarian Feminism)²⁷, Judit Acsády makes a distinction between Feminism and feminist struggles in Hungary. Feministic was, for example, Pálné Veres's work to organize girls'

²⁷Judit Acsády, "A hazai feminizmus fénykora. A mozgalom előnyei és kibontakozása a századelőn", *Feminista Almanach*, Budapest: Minők Egyes.: NőTárs Alapítvány, 2005.

highschool education. She was the ardent follower of the Wollstoncraft-ian theory that women were in the same way capable to study as men. In 1886 was published for the first time the newspaper “Nemzet Nőnevelés” (The National Education of Women), the writers of which became later the members of the feminist movement. The beginning of feminism in Hungary was highly influenced by the tendency of the end of the century, that more and more women refused to get married. Single women wanted to get jobs, and in from 1885 women’s employment became legal. Judit Acsády’s text is important because it follows the development of Hungarian feminism from the very beginning. The “Nőtisztviselők Egyesülete” (The Association of Women Officials) was founded in 1896, and from this association was born in 1904 the “Feministák Egyesülete” (The Association of Feminists); their aim was to gain equality for women in every field. The Association of Feminists from Hungary became the member organization of The National Women Suffrage. The head of the Association was Vilma Glücklich.

According to the data collected from Judit Acsády’s book, the Association of Feminists worked together with the Social Democrat womens’ movement, and their aim was to participate in the anti-war propaganda. Later, the Hungarian State Socialism tried to erase the movements, or to identify the emancipation with the socialist type restricted emancipation. In 1907 the Association published for the first time “Nő és Társadalom” (Woman and Society), which changed its title to “The Woman” in 1914. The Association was a political, cultural and social movement, which was the host of the 7th Congress of the National Women Suffrage organized in Budapest in 1913. The Association also had male members, who worked together for women’s rights. I think it is worth mentioning that in 1911 Gusztáv Dirner organized the “Férfilega a nők választójogáért” (Men League

for Women Suffrage). Even if the feminist movements in Hungary were successful, and the members active and enthusiastic, Nóra Séllei claims that “the feminist discourse has appeared with delay in Hungary”²⁸. The information about feminist movements in Hungary are essential in the analysis of *The Black Piano*, because the main protagonist gets involved with them, as long as she becomes the journalist of the first Hungarian feminist newspaper.

In the following I would like to concentrate on the reception of feminist literature in Hungary, because it is strongly connected to the exclusion of the feminist crime fiction from the Hungarian literary canon.

3.1. Hungarian Feminist Literature

If somebody writes her thesis about the Hungarian feminist crime fiction, it is quite shocking to meet the following questions in the beginning of Nóra Séllei’s article: “Do Hungarian feminist literature and cultural criticism exist? If there exist, how can we talk about them, and in what kind of representational forms do they appear?”²⁹ I have mentioned before that some authors made serious research for the first Hungarian crime fiction, but how could we argue about the first Hungarian feminist crime fiction, if the existence of the Hungarian feminist literature is questionable?! In their writings Nóra Séllei, Györgyi Horváth and Márta Várnagyi present the situation of the Hungarian feminist literature.

²⁸ Nóra Séllei, *Miért félünk a farkastól? Feminista irodalomszemlélet itt és most* (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2007): 140.

²⁹ Nóra Séllei, *Miért félünk a farkastól? Feminista irodalomszemlélet itt és most* (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2007): 140.

Nóra Séllei argues that along with the delayed appearance of the feminist discourse in Hungary one can find post-feminism (considered as antifeminist) which tried to erase the not so strong feminist cultural criticism. The appearance of the feminist discourse in the literature coincides with the changing of the regime. In her article *Így írunk mi—A magyar feminista irodalomtudomány (ön)megjelenítése* (“This is the Way we Write—the (Self) Presentation of the Hungarian Feminist Literature”) the author comments on the ambivalent situation of this type of literature: compared to the canonized literature it is marginalized, but it has famous international relations. The foreign bibliography has a greatest legitimacy; that is why the Hungarian feminist authors do not refer to each other’s text, fact that can be considered a real mistake, if writers do not follow carefully the works of others. Séllei thinks that till everybody wants to prove her feminist pioneer importance, feminist writers will never have unity, which would be very important, if we think about their relation with canonized literature. Györgyi Horváth considers the same when she believes that the problem of the feminist literature is far from being recognized as relevant by the Hungarian literature. Márta Várnagy writes with indignation that a part of the Hungarian literature only now, in our days discovers the feminist discourse and women’s voice in writing. Somehow the feminist literature has to be kept in secret, and there are few who know about Jolán Földes, Piroska Szenes, Renée Erdős and Anna Lesznai. In her text “A női irodalom és a feminista irodalomkritika Magyarországon”³⁰(The Feminist Literature and the Feminist Literary Criticism in Hungary), she makes a small inventory which shows that in the

³⁰ Márta Várnagy, “A női irodalom és a feminista irodalomkritika Magyarországon”, Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem, http://www2.arts.u-szeged.hu/ieas/gender/tntef/vol1/iss1/03_varnagy.pdf.html (accessed May 5, 2011).

literary life women writers are not taken seriously. In 2008 the Írószövetség (Writers' League) organized a discussion where women did not speak. In the book "303 regény, amit el kell olvasnod, mielőtt meghalsz" (303 Novels You should Read before You Die), only nineteen women writers are presented; and in the "Kortárs Irodalmi Olvasókönyv" (Postmodern Literary Reader) there are presented forty-one male writers, and six women writers. Women writers are relegated to the pink section of pulp fictions, because, as Várnagyi quotes Györgyi Horváth "(...) the criterion of becoming part of the high literature carried (and carries) a sexual subtext."³¹ Among women the rhetoric of silence can be observed; and their self definition can be characterized by pessimism and uncertainty. There exist two groups of women writers: those who assume the feminist point of view, and those who consider that literature has no gender. What I want to add to this part of my chapter is, that the word "feminist" has a negative connotation, that is why the reception of the two anthologies *Éjszakai állatkert*, 2005 (Zoo at Night) and *Szomjas oázis* (Thirsty Oasis) was not only a literary event, but also a political one, and they received many negative critiques.

After presenting the situation of the Hungarian crime fiction, and the Hungarian feminist literature, it won't be difficult to think about the place of *The Black Piano* in our literature. I am aware that many of the readers will categorize it in the "pink sector of yellow books"³², but I am sure that it is an important book. Moreover, I don't want to analyze it in the Hungarian literary canon, because its principle is dominated by the patriarchal taste.

³¹ Márta Várnagyi, "A női irodalom és a feminista irodalomkritika Magyarországon", Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem, http://www2.arts.u-szeged.hu/ieas/gender/tntef/vol1/iss1/03_varnagyi.pdf.html (accessed May 5, 2011).

³² Ibid.

One can see what a problematic life had the crime fiction in Hungary, and what kind of difficulties did the authors meet if they tried to create in the genre. Despite the fact that the crime fiction has an unclear tradition with many contradictions, in 2010 Katalin Baráth published a feminist detective novel that is a special attempt, because she is the second woman writer who managed to create such a literary work.

The Black Piano by Katalin Baráth is an important novel from several points of view: it corresponds to the model of the crime fiction, because it contains every single element necessary in the genre (plot, crime, detective, criminal, victim, moral balance and imbalance, secret, solution), but it also gives something new. The detective is not a real detective, but an amateur, a feminist young girl; the investigation is made by more than one person, and the criminal has a love affair with the main protagonist. Moreover, after the investigation ends, the story of Veronika Dávid continues. As the writer claims in the interview, she plans to continue her protagonist's story. It seems that the book cannot be separated from the traditional English crime fiction, but I will analyze the novel in the second chapter of my thesis.

The aim of this chapter was to present the historical, socio-political and the factors of literary history which influenced the development of the Hungarian crime fiction. Neither the police, nor amateur detectives have a long existence in Hungary's history that is why policemen and detectives could not become the favorites of readers. The Hungarian readers were well cultivated in the genre, because the works of the great American and English writers reached to them through translations, but our writers had great difficulties. They could choose to become the epigones of the foreign authors, or to

invent a new style, which turned out not to be really successful. The development of the Hungarian crime fiction was blocked by the elitist Nyugat, while later, in the Socialism the politics intervened in the literary field, and influenced the crime fiction in a negative way. I found only few bibliographies referring to the topic, because only three or four authors deal with the issue.

As I have stated before, the place of *The Black Piano* is outside the Hungarian literary canon, firstly, because as a crime fiction, is excluded from the elitist literature; secondly, being a feminist writing is not welcomed by the main stream literature which is dominated by the patriarchal taste. Being outside the canon is not a problem, since many writings belonging to the entertaining literature are as valuable, as those which are canonized. The aim of Katalin Baráth's book is not necessarily the entertaining: of course she wants to entertain, because as we can read in the interview, she writes because of pleasure. But she also wants to present the atmosphere of the period: historical events; changes in the social and political life; and the struggles of a woman who wants to be more than the milieu she lives in wants her to be: housewife and mother.

“A Suitable Job for a Woman”, or the Place of the Female Main Protagonist in the Detective Story

In the previous chapter I focused on the place of *The Black Piano* in the Hungarian literature, and now I would like to concentrate on the place of the female character in the detective story. The aim of this chapter is to analyze the questions whether crime fiction is suitable for the women, in a position other than that of the victim; and whether crime fiction is an acceptable genre for feminism or not, and if it is, how and why. Karel Čapek considers that women can only be victims in the crime novel, and he sees this rational genre in danger because of the infusion of romance in the plot. Kathleen Gregory Klein believes that feminist authors are trapped by the genre, because a licensed private eye cannot act against the system which oppresses her.

In the Introduction of my thesis I claimed that Katalin Baráth created an entirely new genre with the publishing of *The Black Piano*, and in order to show how this new genre was produced, and to answer the above mentioned questions, I would like to analyze Baráth's novel with the help of several secondary literary sources written by Krisztián Benyovszky, Kathleen Gregory Klein, John G. Cawetti, Daniela Zeca and Merja Makinen.

1. “*Unsuitable job for a woman?*”³³

Krisztián Benyovszky adopted the title of P. D. James' novel (*An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, 1972) for his article, in order to prove that the genre of the crime fiction doesn't

³³Krisztián Benyovszky, “Unsuitable Job for a Woman?”, *Kalligram*, (November 2010). http://www.kalligram.com/?cl=casopis_cislo&iid=56&PHPSESSID=47f40489bad5fee0863d52b81c6d0c8f.html (accessed May 10, 2011).

lose its value, if the male detective is replaced by a female one. He bases his study on the two Hungarian feminist detective stories, *The Black Piano* and Nina Stein's book, *Katalin leányai*³⁴ (Katalin's Daughters). Benyovszky reflects on the Czech writer's, Karel Čapek's arguments, who complained that the crime fiction became too romantic and sentimental. He claimed that the romantic story included in the detective novel was totally useless, because it drew the readers' attention away from the mystery, while the kiss and the date of the wedding became more important. The reader faces again the situation that women cannot be seen outside the private sphere, marriage and romantic stories, and they are trapped in the stereotype rational man/emotional woman. Čapek believed that women could only participate in the plot of the crime story only as victims. With the help of Benyovszky's article I want to prove, that women are perfect in the role of the amateur investigator.

My opinion is, that Čapek's claims are not relevant, if I consider the woman's presence in *The Black Piano*. The main protagonist is a rational young girl, who is intelligent and well educated, and manages to read the clues, and to discover the criminal. Katalin Baráth constructs her book in a way that the crime story comes to a happy end, but the love story doesn't, fact which shows that the detective novel is not threatened by sentimental scenes and the woman amateur investigator can exist also outside the wedlock. Veronika Dávid has a job, and later becomes a journalist. The feminist crime fiction deconstructs the stereotypes about women, and proves that they are capable of rational thinking, strength and courage.

Krisztián Benyovszky argues that another positive characteristic of *The Black Piano* is, that it can also be considered a historical novel, as long as it was written in the memory

³⁴ Nina Stein, *Katalin leányai*, Budapest: Athenaeum, 2009.

of those women who belonged to the first wave feminism in Hungary; moreover, on the page 211 of the novel there is a reference to the crime committed in Tiszaeszlár³⁵, where, according to the public opinion, a protestant servant was killed by the Jews, because of ritualistic reasons. Benyovszky reminds the reader of two other important aspects of the book. One is that in *The Black Piano* the gossip has the same great importance as in the Marple-stories, because the gossip turns out to be a very useful source of information. The other aspect is that “reading” the clues is equal with reading a text: the person who loves literature, and has an analytical thinking can become a good investigator. In his article Benyovszky greets the writers of the two feminist crime fictions, and he thinks that Katalin Baráth and Nina Stein managed to create good writings in the genre. Benyovszky worked like an investigator in order to find out all the possible information about the Hungarian crime fiction, so, if he thinks that the two above mentioned books are of value, I agree with his claim. If women can be as talented investigators, as men, this further means, that the role of the detective is also suitable for a feminist woman.

2. “An Unsuitable Job for a Feminist?”³⁶

In this part of my thesis chapter I would like to keep in focus Kathleen Gregory Klein’s text *The Woman Detective. Gender and Genre*³⁷, namely the chapter *An Unsuitable Job for a Feminist?*, in which the author argues, that the woman investigator

³⁵ <http://www.freepress-freespeech.com/holhome/kiscikk2/tiszaeszl.htm>, (accessed June 4, 2011).

³⁶ Kathleen Gregory Klein, *The Woman Detective. Gender and Genre*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

³⁷ Ibid., 199.

has to decide whether she acts in or outside the patriarchal system. Gregory Klein believes that replacing the male detective with a female one is not so simple: “At first, this appropriation of traditionally male space for women appears to favor feminist goals (...). But the task is more complex than simply replacing a male protagonist with a female one!”³⁸ Moreover, she argues that adopting the formula of the detective fiction traps the feminist women writers:

“The private eye who is licensed by the state has made an official and a silent contract with the system; she or he is a part of the power structure. (...) To avoid being co-opted, revolutionaries must operate outside the system like guerillas.”³⁹

My aim is to prove, that crime fiction is a suitable genre for feminism, and feminist woman are talented investigators. The question is, whether the main protagonist of *The Black Piano* acts in or outside the system, and what kind of system is the rules of which she adopts or refuses. Veronika is not a licensed private eye; she works because of pleasure, need for adventure and a sense of truth. By working against crime she posits herself on the side of the Good, the Positive forces; still she acts against and together with the patriarchal system from where the crime must be relegated with the help of the police. But this system is not trustworthy, as long as it oppresses women and ethnic minorities. We must remember that Lipót Rosenberg, the Jewish architect is killed by the guards of the prison, because they believed him to be the criminal of Christian people. The guards do not wait until Rosenberg is sentenced in a legal way, but they let themselves be lead by anti-Semitic feelings. The system which is anti-feminist and anti-Semitic, is a system of violence. Veronika belongs only to that point in this frame, while she wants to cooperate in finding of the criminal, but she knows that violence cannot be erased by

³⁸ Ibid., 200.

³⁹ Ibid., 220.

violence, and the murderer must be found by using the rational thinking. She fights for women's rights and a world without crime that is why we can say that mostly she acts like a guerilla. She is a good detective, who finds the criminal by going on her own way. If she had been a licensed private eye, which was quite impossible for a woman in a world where even amateur detectives did not exist, she would still have belonged only in 10% to the system, while she accepted only the task to find the criminal. That is why I think that adopting the formula of the detective fiction does not trap its authors, and crime story is a suitable "job" for a feminist.

3. Following the Formula or "Reenergizing" the Genre?

In this part of the chapter I would like to answer the question how Katalin Baráth managed to create an entirely new genre by following the formula of the classical detective story, but in the same time refreshing the genre with new elements. My analysis will be based on a secondary literary source written by John G. Cawetti, the "Adventure, Mystery and Romance"⁴⁰.

John G. Cawetti built his article on Poe's definition of the aspects of the detective story. These aspects are the following: situation; introduction of the detective; pattern of action (crime and clue, investigation, announcement of the solution, explanation of the solution, denouement); characters and relationships and the setting, where the plot takes place. I will analyze *The Black Piano* according to Poe's model of the crime fiction, taking into consideration Cawetti's comments.

⁴⁰ John G. Cawetti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 85-105.

According to John G. Cawetti, Poe defined the aspects of the detective story, placing the *situation* in the beginning of the story: “The classical detective story begins with the unsolved crime and moves toward the elucidation of the mystery”⁴¹. Katalin Baráth knows quite well the formula, still perplexes the reader for a minute, because *The Black Piano* begins with a love scene between Armand, the knight, and Josephine, the marquise. This is a false situation with an artificial language, which disappointed me, as a reader. The real plot begins after Josephine’s story, and the text containing the love scene is written by the main protagonist of the novel, Veronika Dávid, and, as we find out, the whole book deals with texts. Veron wants to become a writer, she is well educated and interested in literature; the crimes are committed being based on a poem, *The Black Piano*, which is also the title of the book; and after finding the criminal, Veron becomes a journalist. The crimes themselves function like texts, because the investigators read the clues, but now let’s concentrate on the formula. Katalin Baráth follows the formula, even if she first uses a false situation. The situation that starts the plot, is the entering the scene of Vili, the first victim.

The next element of the formula is the *introduction of the detective*: “The classical detective usually has little real personal interest in the crime he is investigating”⁴². Veron’s only personal interest in the crime is that the first victim dies in the shop where she works. Katalin Baráth refreshes the genre by introducing someone, who is not a detective (a young girl endowed with courage and reason), and the investigation is made by a group formed by Veron, the main protagonist, Doctor Vékony, Lázó Dujmovics,

⁴¹ Ibid., 80.

⁴² John G. Cawetti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 81.

captain of the police, and Ákos Losonczy, famulus of the captain, and the murderer in the same time.

The introduction of the detective is followed by other elements belonging to the *Pattern of action*: crime and clues; investigation; announcement of the solution; explanation of the solution and denouement. The first crime is the result of the rivalry between two masons, a Hungarian and a Jewish one, who apply for the construction of the new town hall. As Doctor Vékony claims in the explanation of the solution, “in our country it is very easy to create an anti-Semitic hysteria.”⁴³. The Hungarian architect wants to gain the application from his Jewish colleague that is why he manages to make him the suspect of the crime by using the anti-Semitic feelings of the people. The writer introduces two criminals: the first is the Hungarian architect, and the second, who commits two other crimes, is his pander, the young soldier, Kálmán Horváth, using the pseudonym Ákos Losonczy, who is also the colleague of the captain. As shown above, Katalin Baráth follows the formula of the classical crime fiction, but she also diverges from it. She introduces false clues (the poem “The Black Piano”, found in the victims’ pockets); two of the crimes are committed in order to cover the first one. As I have mentioned above, we have three persons, who make the investigation, the fourth is the criminal, and the solution of the research is found by two persons in two different places: the captain of the police learns in the jail what Veron finds out in her lover’s home, during a romantic visit: that Ákos Losonczy, the charming young soldier is an impostor.

What are really significant in the book, are the announcement of the solution and the explanation of the solution. These are made by Doctor Vékony, the respectable internist of the town. The reader has the chance to “see” a performance: a prestigious,

⁴³ Katalin Baráth, *A fekete zongora* (Budapest: Agave könyvek, 2010), 259. (The translation is mine).

middle aged man (!) reestablishes the disturbed order of the patriarchal society by explaining how things happened. He hardly mentions the importance of Veron in the investigation, pointing out only that she managed to “read” the false clues. Moreover, the main protagonist is not even present on this “performance”: she was caught almost naked in the home of the criminal (a man!), so, according to the rules of the patriarchal society, she is no more a decent girl, she has to hide herself from the eyes of the town. The reader is the witnesses of two reestablished orders: the first is the peace of the community, given back after finding the criminal. The second is the peace of the misogynist society, disturbed by the presence of the feminist amateur detective, who made herself seen and heard in a place and in a period of time where women were supposed to be silent.

The denouement of the plot is also surprising, because Veron’s story doesn’t come to an end with the finding of the criminal. She leaves the town, which offers no chances of development for a young feminist, who never wanted to fit in the rules of the community. Veron travels to Budapest, with a new haircut (short hair!) and becomes the journalist of the feminist newspaper of the period *A nő* (The Woman), newspaper I have mentioned in the first chapter of my thesis, having its editor in chief, Róza Schwimmer, enthusiastic member of the Feminist movement in Hungary. According to the misogynist mentality, the main protagonist gets involved again in something not fit for a woman: she continues her life like a journalist, and also writing literature, using the pen, as symbol of the penis⁴⁴. Moreover, she meets Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie’s protagonist, a meeting which is instructive from several points of view.

⁴⁴ See Reddy, T. Maureen, *Sisters in crime. Feminism and the Crime Novel*, New York: A Frederick Ungar Book, 1988.

Katalin Baráth makes a connection between the situation of the police of the time and the situation of women in Hungary. Poirot's way of thinking is not understood, and is refused by the Hungarian police, and this is the same that happens with the young feminist journalist, who is seen as an outsider in the society. The meeting of the two "outsiders" proves that Hungary of the time was not ready to accept new ways of thinking. In the following I would like to concentrate on the last two groups of elements of the classical detective story.

One group is the Characters and relationships, including the victim, the criminal, the detective and those threatened by the murderer, but incapable of solving the crime; the other important component is the Setting, where the story takes place. I will analyze the relationship of the detective and the criminal according to Patricia E. Johnson's text "Sex and Betrayal in the Detective Fiction of Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky"⁴⁵, but first I would like to comment on the issue of the Setting.

Poe's opinion is, that the setting must be isolated, "marked off from the rest of the world"⁴⁶. The small town Ókanizsa is really an isolated place, good to emphasize the contrast between the community and the main protagonist. Ókanizsa is inhabited by gentlemen who can move in the public sphere, and decent women, who are restricted to the private sphere of the home. In this space Veronika Dávid is a very strident figure, who tries to move between the two spheres of private and public. As a feminist, she enjoys more the public sphere, spending her time in her workplace, coffee houses and cultural events.

⁴⁵ Patricia E. Johnson, "Sex and Betrayal in the Detective Fiction of Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky" *Journal of Popular Culture* (27 April 1994): 97-106.

⁴⁶ John G. Cawetti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 96.

Through the setting the author presents the social, historical, political and cultural background of the novel. The society was built in a way that restricted women's chances, but still, the beginning of the 1900th was the time when the Hungarian Feminism started to function in order to liberate them. This period was ideal for the flourishing of club life: even women had the opportunity to participate in different organizations and literary clubs; and this was the time when the elitist literary newspaper, the *Nyugat* began its "life". The political background was infused with anti-Semitic mentality, which was useful for the criminal to deflect the suspicion to a Jewish person.

As one can see, Katalin Baráth follows, even if not strictly, the formula of the classical detective story, but she also adds new elements, which are important for feminist agency. The term "feminist agency" belongs to the theories of philosophical feminism; it means an account of women's "capacity for individualized choice and action"⁴⁷ In the following I would like to concentrate on the detective, and the relationship between the investigator and criminal, with the help of Patricia E. Johnson's and Daniela Zeca's texts.

In her book "Melonul domnului comisar"⁴⁸(The Bowler of Mister Commisar), Daniela Zeca refers to Francis Lacassin, who talked about the mythology of the detective. The detective impersonates the nostalgia after a Hero, who is always situated on the side of the positive forces. He is the symbol of the Good, who brings the crime story to a happy end, and who establishes the lost order and safety in the society. We could ask whether Veron is a hero/heroine or not. The society where she lives refuses her: women admire her, but they don't dare to follow her in her feminist struggles; men see her as an interesting, but annoying person, who always wants to be seen and heard, instead of

⁴⁷ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1565026/agency.html>, (accessed June 5, 2011).

⁴⁸ Daniela Zeca, *Melonul domnului comisar*, Bucuresti: Curtea veche, 2005.

being obedient and silent. Obviously, in a misogynist society she cannot be a heroine: she is not even recognized as really useful for the investigation, while she only managed to read the false clues; moreover, she is thought to be a fallen woman, who was seen naked in a man's house that is why she has to leave her hometown. But from a feminist point of view Veron is a heroine because she is a pioneer in the fight for the rights of women, moreover, our protagonist contributed to reestablish the peace in the community, disturbed by the multiple crimes. Veronika Dávid is on the right side, she symbolizes the positive forces in the fight for women's rights and in the war against crime and violence. According to Merja Makinen's text "Feminism and the »Crisis of Masculinity« in Contemporary British Crime Fiction"⁴⁹, the feminist detectives challenge society's expectation of what is appropriate for a woman. They are not celibate, but show emotional engagement and sexual desire, and these are the starting points of an interesting twist in the feminist crime fictions: the sexual relation of the detective and the criminal. In the next part of my chapter I would like to reflect on the relation of the detective with the criminal, with the help of Patricia E. Johnson's article.

In the chapter "Sex and Betrayal" of Johnson's text she argues that "(...) the professional detective who becomes sexually involved with a suspect who then turns out to be implicated in the crime, this occurs in several recent novels by female writers (...) "⁵⁰. The article deals with Sue Grafton's Kinsey Milhonne, the protagonist of *A is for Alibi* (1982) and Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski from the book *Bitter Medicine* (1987), but the love affair between detective and criminal is relevant for *The Black Piano*, too.

⁴⁹Merja Makinen, "Feminism and the »Crisis of Masculinity« in Contemporary British Crime Fiction", *Crime Scenes. Detective Narratives in European Culture since 1945*. eds. Mullen, Anne, O'Beirne, Emer (Amsterdam Atlanta, Rodopi: 2000), 254-265.

⁵⁰ Patricia E. Johnson, "Sex and Betrayal in the Detective Fiction of Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky " *Journal of Popular Culture* (27 April 1994): 97.

Veron is not a professional detective, but she works to find the criminal, and Ákos Losonczy is not a suspect as long as he is the aid of the captain of the police, and he also attends the investigation. Still, their relationship is dominated by power, danger and violence, which are characteristic in the stories of Kinsey Milhonne and V.I. Warshawski. The relationship between Veron and Ákos is a fight between a strong, rational woman and an artful man, who pretends to be on the right side, while he is a gambler, a love lace and the criminal of two people. Who has the power in such a relationship? Who uses violence against the other person, and who is in danger?

Obviously, Veron's life is in danger in the moment she discovers that Ákos is the criminal. Her armor against the injustice of the misogynist society is intelligence and culture, and the symbol of culture becomes a gun in her hand: she knocks down the murderer with a huge book, one of the volumes of the Révai Encyclopaedia. The masquerade ends, Veron proves that she is a strong girl, but the love is also over. The self defense scene proves her, that it was not a wise idea to let herself lead by emotions, moreover, the attempt to spend her first night with a man, without being married, has failed. Only her two wishes, to catch the murderer, and to have an exciting life, were fulfilled.

In the chapter "Sex and Betrayal" the following quotation raises a series of questions referring to *The Black Piano*: "Both Grafton and Paretsky define themselves as feminists, and both are seen as feminists by critics, yet both create female detectives who imitate a male model almost to a tee—the hard-boiled male detective, emotionally and financially independent, a loner, without a family."⁵¹ Does the protagonist of *The Black*

⁵¹Patricia E. Johnson, "Sex and Betrayal in the Detective Fiction of Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky " *Journal of Popular Culture* (27 April 1994): 97.

Piano imitate a hard-boiled male detective? Or her struggles for freedom be considered as an imitation? Veron is financially independent, because she works in a small paper shop, however she is supposed by the society to stay at home and to find a rich husband. Veron doesn't want to get married; she rides a bike, which is considered unsuitable for a girl and strange even for a boy; she travels alone in order to see the great Hungarian poet, Endre Ady; she writes and reads; she is rational and tries to find the criminal...and she is loner in her struggles for feminism. She imitates the male model; rather she fights for agency, which is the natural attitude of every human being who can think about her situation.

Patricia E. Johnson argues that Jane S. Bakerman and Maureen T. Reddy have a positive attitude towards the feminist crime fiction, because they think, that the feminist rewriting of the hard-boiled detective story "reenergizes" the old literary pattern. This is true, because along with other characteristics, the romantic story brings new, positive pulsation in the plot, but "the sexual relationship with a male suspect violently threatens a self-definition based on a precarious balancing act"⁵². In the traditional romance women are placed in a passive position, and they risk more in a sexual or a potentially sexual relationship, as Johnson states in her article. Even if she is a young feminist, who works to be financially independent, Veron lives with her family, which is not supportive in her struggles for freedom. In her love story she remains in the passive position, even if she defends her opinion with a strong will: she is asked out by her boyfriend from the parents; she is accompanied by Ákos, and taken home early, because night life belongs only to men, moreover, she is challenged to prove her love by going to the man's house.

⁵² Patricia E. Johnson, "Sex and Betrayal in the Detective Fiction of Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky" *Journal of Popular Culture* (27 April 1994): 99.

Her decision to spend the night with Ákos corresponds with her own will, but she is obliged to do it not when she wants, but when her lover decides, in order not to lose him. And she risks more with the sexual or potentially sexual relationship than the young soldier, who had a lot of lovers. She fails to get the experience of spending the night with a man; still, she loses her honor, because she is discovered almost naked in the boy's room. Veron loses her job because of the incident, and is obliged to leave Ókanizsa as a despised woman. Even if she is not successful; she is a pioneer in the fight of women's right to a free sexual life.

In this chapter I wanted to prove that the role of the detective is suitable for women as well as for feminist women. She is functional in the position of the private eye, and the romantic story does not threaten the genre with becoming too "pink": emotions do not drive away the attention of the reader from the mystery, and the feminist detective story deconstructs the stereotype rational man/emotional woman. The woman can be in the same time rational and intelligent as well as emotional and sexually active.

The genre does not trap the author, and the female detective who is a feminist, can work together with the system as long as she can decide which aspects of the patriarchal framework she will accept.

The author of *The Black Piano* respects the formula of the classical detective story, but not strictly, because she introduces new elements which manage to refresh the genre. The readers have the chance to see a detective story without a detective. The detective's position is decentralized, while the investigation is made by more than one person, and the solution is found out by two people in two different places and time. The mythology

of the Hero is also deconstructed, because the main protagonist is not a licensed private eye, still she does her research well. Veron is a heroine only from the point of view of feminism, because she is one of the founders of the Feminist struggle in Hungary, who manages to become financially independent, by working as a journalist.

The sexual or pseudo sexual relationship between the female detective and the criminal is also a new element in the feminist crime fiction, as well as the infusion of the detective story with love. The love affair does not destroy the crime story, but makes it more entertaining. Moreover, where the crime ends, the love is also over, but the story of the main protagonist continues. The main character is a person who loves literature, but instead of reading texts she reads clues in order to discover the criminal: in this way the crime itself gets the characteristics of a text, but about this issue I would like to argue in the following chapter.

Reading the Body, Petting the Text, or the Relations of Text and Body in *The Black Piano*

In the previous chapter I argued that the feminist detective story enriched the genre of crime fiction with new elements: it deconstructed the stereotype rational man/emotional woman; the role of the detective is decentralized. The male body of the investigator is substituted by a female body, which has several important consequences. With the presence of the female body the possibilities of love story and erotic scenes are introduced into the genre, broadening the possibilities of critical analysis. In this chapter I will use another type of feminist reading, namely the corporeal narratology, which is centered around the relation between text and body.

According to Anna Kérchy's text, *Tapogatózások, a test elméleteinek alakzatai*⁵³ (Groping. The Forms of the Body's Theories) corporeal narratology means the simultaneous analysis of the body's text and the text's body. In my analysis I use Ágnes Pethő's work, *Múzsák tükre*⁵⁴ (The Mirror of Muses), Anna Kérchy's above mentioned text and Krisztián Benyovszky's *A jelek szerint. A detektívtörténet és közép-európai emléknymai*⁵⁵ (According to the Signs, The Detective Story and the Signs of its Memory in Central Europe), because these books deal with the relation of body and text, which is a very important aspect for the feminist way of thinking, as shown in the following quotation, the translation of which is mine:

⁵³ Anna Kérchy, "Tapogatózások. A test elméleteinek alakzatai", <http://apertura.hu/2009/oldal5.html> (accessed May 25, 2011).

⁵⁴ Ágnes Pethő, *Múzsák tükre. Az intermedialitás és az önreflexió poétikája a filmben*, Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2003.

⁵⁵ Krisztián Benyovszky, *A jelek szerint. A detektívtörténet és közép-európai emléknymai*, Pozsony: Kalligran kiadó, 2003.

“If we consider the Western cultural cliché which associates the woman with her objectified, irrational corporeality, and in this way it deprives her from her authority, speaking up and the privileged position of subjectivity, it is not surprising that the constantly returning dilemma of certain feminist branches is the relation of text and body. Other assumptions related to feminist narratives, too, urge the working out of feminist corporeal narratology.”⁵⁶

It is useful to consider the works of the above mentioned authors, because, firstly, in my thesis I propose a feminist reading of *The Black Piano*, and secondly, because the plot of the book is built on the strong relation between text and body. Before analyzing *The Black Piano* I would like to drive one's attention on something that precedes the body/text relation in the plot: at this point we meet the author, the reader, the text and the main character.

In her article *Tapogatózások, a test elméleteinek alakzatai* (Groping. The Forms of the Body's Theories), Anna Kérchy refers to Daniel Punday, who introduced the term corporeal narratology⁵⁷, because in the last few decades the relation of body and narrative was not only in the center of feminists' attention, but also of gender studies scholars. Punday considered that our imaginations about the body influence the plot of our stories, the choosing of the place where actions happen, the characterization of the protagonists etc. Moreover, in the process of reading a corporeal atmosphere will be born between the author, the text, the protagonist and the reader. One can see, that even before and outside the plot of the novel the body/text relationship exists. The imaginations of the author and of the reader about the body influence the text and each other. The following part of the chapter deals with the erotic feature of the relation between text and body. According to

⁵⁶ Anna Kérchy, “Tapogatózások. A test elméleteinek alakzatai”, <http://apertura.hu/2009/oldal5.html> (accessed May 25, 2011).

⁵⁷ Daniel Punday, *Narrative Bodies: toward a Corporeal Narratology*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

the online Dictionary, "erotic" means "arousing or satisfying sexual desire"⁵⁸. In my opinion it is worth comparing Katalin Baráth's novel with *The Pillow Book*, film directed by the British Peter Greenaway, in 1996. The novel and the film, two different mediums, can be compared on the level of the plot, and its relations to body and text.

Both *The Black Piano* and *The Pillow Book* are built on the above mentioned relation, but Peter Greenaway and Katalin Baráth handle the issue in different ways. Baráth's crime fiction begins with a chapter written by the main protagonist, and which deals with the body: it is about an erotic scene between the knight and the marquise. While Veron writes about an erotic relation, Nagiko, the main character of the *Pillow Book*, who wants to find the perfect lover and calligrapher, writes on the body, so in this way the act of writing gets an erotic feature. There exists a sharp distinction between Nagiko's and Veron's story, because the former is built on the motif paintbrush/penis, while the latter on the pen/penis motif. The paintbrush is a symbol of visual art, because calligraphy is writing and painting in the same time, while the pen suggests that in *The Black Piano* the content of Veron's writing is more important. The crime fiction remains on the level of the text: the reader finds out nothing about the love scene (story within the story), because the act is interrupted abruptly by the entering in the shop and the death of the first victim. Veron puts her chapter quickly in the drawer, and she never finishes it. So it happens with her, when she finds out, that her lover is the murderer: the discovery of the crime puts and end to the erotic moments. She later continues her life in the world of texts, as a newspaper writer. Her will to spend the night with a man without marriage fails, while in *The Pillow Book* love scenes have a great importance, and the body has a privilege above the text. Jerome's flayed skin is turned in the pages of a book, and the

⁵⁸ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/erotic>.

publisher, before he is killed, covers his naked body with the book made of skin. In this act not the text is important, but the material of the book: the contact of the two skins, the body surface of the dead and that of the still living man, it is like the last hug between the two former lovers (Jerome and the publisher were in a homosexual relationship). In the *Pillow Book* the body is turned into text, and the text is turned into a body: they cannot be separated anymore. Body text and textual body have a different aspect in *The Black Piano*, and in the following I would like to discuss how the difference manifests. In order to prove that the body is turned into a text, and the text is turned into a body in the crime novel, but in a different way than in the *Pillow Book*, I have to start my analysis from another point, namely from the point of view of *signs*.

I would like to consider the scene in *The Black Piano*, when Veron visits her lover in his home. The scene can be found in the end of the detective novel: the crime story reaches to a happy ending, the social order is on the way of being restored, but the love story ends with disappointment. It is a moment when not only the bodies of the lovers, but also the crime becomes naked. Before understanding how the crime becomes a naked body, I would like to explain first how the crime first gets the features of a text, and then this text is turned into a body. For this analysis I will use Krisztián Benyovszky's article, *A jelek szerint. A detektívtörténet és közép-európai emlékművei*⁵⁹ (According to the Signs. The Detective Story and the Signs of its Memory in Central Europe).

Benyovszky argues that the crime can be considered as a wound on the community's body (community, in our case, means the group of people living in Ókanizsa), a rupture on the texture (text/texture) of the society, which must be corrected,

⁵⁹ Krisztián Benyovszky, *A jelek szerint. A detektívtörténet és közép-európai emlékművei*, Pozsony: Kalligran kiadó, 2003.

healed. Moreover, he cites Tomáš Horváth, because one can find more relations of body/text in the crime fiction: “the victim’s body, and the place where it can be found...become a significant practice, a text”⁶⁰. The place of the crime becomes a text which will be read by the recipient, who positions herself/himself near the detective. In the article *A jelek szerint. A detektívtörténet és közép-európai emléknymai*⁶¹ (According to the Signs. The Detective Story and the Signs of its Memory in Central Europe) I found a quotation by Jenő Heltai, which also emphasizes crime’s relation with the text: “the criminal writes a text for the police, constructing in this way the net of relations, small references, false clues and »purloined letters« left in the sight of eyes”⁶². In the crime fiction everything becomes a sign, which will be read by the detective. Benyovszky emphasizes the importance of signs, because the investigator has to discover, what is a real sign and what is a false one. The yellow handkerchief is a real clue that leads Veron to the recognizing of the criminal, while the poem, *The Black Piano* written by Endre Ady, the Hungarian poet, is a false clue, which has the role to drive the investigator away from the crime. When the reader is a woman, she challenges the binary opposition rational man/emotional woman, but she can also use her intuition in the investigation. Reading and analyzing the poem is equal with reading the clues. If the clues can be read, the crime itself becomes a text. Body becomes text and text becomes body not only because woman and man get undressed in the erotic act, but also because through petting and touching each other they *read* each other’s body. Let’s just think how blind people read: touching the signs in order to understand the meaning, in this way the fingers take

⁶⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Krisztián Benyovszky, *A jelek szerint. A detektívtörténet és közép-európai emléknymai* (Pozsony: Kalligran kiadó, 2003): 24.

over the role of the eyes, touching becomes the look. Of course, body and text can be connected not only in an erotic way, as it happened in the *Pillow Book*, or in the above mentioned love scene. There also exist other ways in which the body becomes text, and the other way around. I will argue about these issues in the following.

The place of the woman in the society of the 1900s can be analyzed from a patriarchal and also from a feminist point of view. The former posits the woman in a too simple place, under which I understand, that women are placed in the private sphere, and those who don't accept the wedlock, can become nuns, or can occupy the despised position of spinsters. The feminist point of view broadens the chances for those who also want to participate in the public sphere, and want to guide their own life. Veron, as a woman, from the patriarchal point of view is a female body, which is seen or read in a certain way by politics, the society and the period of time when the plot of the novel takes place. As a female body, she is posited in the protecting but oppressive environment of the family, from where she can move in the environment of marriage, remaining continuously in the household, the private sphere; she can become a nun, but she cannot remain alone as a working woman, because the community will read her body in a negative way, as if she were a wrong text, or, like the crime, a mistake in the texture of the society. Veron, as a young feminist, reads herself (reader and text in the same person) differently. She constructs her knowledge through texts (she loves literature, writes a novel, works in a book shop, and becomes a journalist) in order to save her female body from the dominant way of reading of patriarchal society. Through her behavior, thoughts and struggles she writes herself in another textual environment, where the female body is read in a way more favorable for her: she can be more than an objectified body. As a

feminist journalist who earns her living through work, she can be the author and the main protagonist of her own life, while the misogynist way of thinking offered her a secondary role: the role of the obedient girl who is lead by her parents' will; who is asked out and courted by her boyfriend; given away by her father and taken as a wife by her husband. The passive voice does not fit Veron, who doesn't like to be read in a certain way by the others, and she writes, but she wants to participate actively in her life, through writing herself. I have one more important suggestion around patriarchal society, marriage and female body.

The patriarchal reading considers the female body as a closed book from a sexual point of view. She mustn't be active: this book will be opened only after marriage for an initiated reader, the husband. The small community of Ókanizsa accepts men as readers, who can open different books (again, men, as readers are active, women as texts, are read, so they are passive), they can visit the house of the prostitute, but when Veron is discovered naked in a man's house, in the active position of the reader, she has to disappear from the sight of the town, because she becomes a disgraced woman: "I am an unprincipled woman, who was found only covered by a sheet"⁶³. This paragraph dealt with the female body becoming a text from the patriarchal and a feminist point of view. In the following paragraph I would like to concentrate on the text as becoming a body.

The scene where the criminal is discovered is a very complex one. It is not only that bodies and texts become naked in the look of the reader, but one mustn't forget the moment when Veron defends herself from the murderer. Veron is an intelligent woman, who tries to handle her knowledge (built on texts) as armor in order to protect herself

⁶³ Katalin Baráth, *A fekete zongora* (Budapest: Agave könyvek, 2010): 268. (The translation of the quotation is mine).

from the pressure of patriarchy, and knowledge defends her from the criminal, who happens to be her lover. The knowledge converted into texts becomes an object, a body, the body of the book, with which the girl knocks down Ákos.

I suggest that bodies and texts blend into each other, idea which is further reinforced in the chapter where Veron meets Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie's protagonists. She identifies herself as the journalist of *The Woman*, to which the doorkeeper reacts in a very typical: "The Woman? What! Now the woman has also been returned into a newspaper?"⁶⁴ The doorkeeper represents the misogynist way of thinking, not understanding that women, as female bodies want something more: they want to write in newspapers like men do, and to write about themselves.

In this chapter of my thesis I focused on a feminist reading which concentrates on corporeal narratology, means the simultaneous analysis of the body's text and the text's body. In the first part of the chapter I presented the text and the body in an erotic atmosphere, to which I added the importance of the crime as a text-as a body, more specifically, when crime can be considered as a text, which blends into a body. Text-as a body is also present in the scene where the knowledge converted into texts-converted into a massive object becomes useful in the self-defense of the main protagonist.

The erotic feature disappears in the section where I deal with women as bodies-as texts in the community, read by the misogynist eye of the society. Textual knowledge posits the woman on a higher scale than the level of the objectified female body.

The aim of my thesis is to prove, that despite the fact that *The Black Piano* is not an accepted writing for the Hungarian literary canon, it is still more than a simple element of

⁶⁴ Ibid., 290.

the popular literature. Under "Simple elements" of popular literature I understand books written to entertain, but which lack a demanding literary style. Without that style texts risk to become pulp fiction. The feminist reading of the text posits it above the popular literature. This chapter contributed to my suggestion that Katalin Baráth's book is a significant novel because its involvement with corporeal narratology. My conclusion is that *The Black Piano* can become interesting for the readers not only as a crime novel and a pseudo-love story, but also as a text read through the lens of body/text relationship.

Conclusion

In my thesis I argued that Hungarian feminist crime fiction, as a genre, exists, and with the publishing of *The Black Piano* Katalin Baráth managed to create a new genre. I suggested a feminist reading of the novel, which is in intertextual relation with Endre Ady's poem, "The Black Piano". The poem has a great importance in the plot of Baráth's book, because the criminal put in the pockets of each victim a copy of the above mentioned text. The three chapters deal with different aspects of *The Black Piano*, trying to find its place in the Hungarian literature; proving that it is a new genre and showing how the novel is built on the idea of corporeal narratology.

The first chapter, "The Place of *The Black Piano* in the Hungarian Literature" deals with the political, historical, social and cultural backgrounds of the novel. The birth of *The Black Piano* was influenced by the existence, or rather non-existence of the Hungarian crime fiction, and also by the reception of the feminist literature in the Hungarian literary canon.

The Hungarian crime fiction cannot be separated by the problematic story of the police and the amateur detective in the country. Hungarian policemen and investigators worked as spies, belonging to different political institutions in different periods of time, serving the interests of the state instead of that of everyday people that is the reason why they did not manage to enter as positive figures in the public opinion and the popular literature.

Hungarian authors created several experimental writings under the influence of the English and the American detective novel, which quickly reached to the Hungarian readers through translations. These readers were very cultivated in the field of the foreign

crime fiction, but the Hungarian elitist literature refused to accept the genre, labeling it “yellow book”, which means valueless, entertaining text. It wasn’t easy for Katalin Baráth to create a feminist crime fiction, firstly, because the genre did not have a tradition in the Hungarian literature, and secondly, because the feminist discourse has a marginal position in comparison with the literary canon. The Hungarian feminist literature cannot be separated from the development of feminism in Hungary, which is also very important because of the plot of *The Black Piano*. The main protagonist of the novel, Veronika Dávid, belongs to the first wave of feminism in Hungary, and she becomes the journalist of the first Hungarian feminist newspaper, *A nő* (The Woman). The place of *The Black Piano* is outside the Hungarian literary canon, but I argued that it is on a higher scale than the simple entertaining writings of the popular literature, because it has historical references, it was written in the memory of those women who belonged to the first wave feminism in Hungary, moreover, Katalin Baráth created a new genre.

In the second chapter of my thesis, “*A Suitable Job for a Woman*”, I concentrated on the formula of the classical detective fiction, elements of which were established by Edgar Allen Poe, father of the detective fiction. The elements of the formula are: the situation; the introduction of the detective; the pattern of action (crime and clues, investigation, announcement of the solution, explanation of the solution, denouement); characters and relationships and setting (the place of the plot). Katalin Baráth managed to create a new genre by following the formula of the classical crime fiction, but not in a strict way, and introducing new elements, which are the following: decentralizing the role of the detective; placing the male private eye by a self made feminist detective; infusing the crime novel with love scenes and continuing the story of the main protagonist after

discovering the criminal. In this chapter I also argued that the role of the detective is suitable for a woman, and also for a feminist woman. Moreover, the genre of feminist crime fiction does not trap its authors, as long as the main protagonist can decide which is the measure she belongs to the patriarchal system, and when is she obliged to behave like a “guerilla”, refusing the rules of the misogynist society. Finally, the genre of the crime fiction is not threatened by the romantic elements, because in *The Black Piano* the love story ends together with the discovering of the criminal, and the main protagonist continues her life as a working woman, refusing the idea of marriage. The last chapter broadens the possibilities of the analysis by introducing the idea of corporeal narratology, which is very important from the point of view of feminist reading.

“Reading the Body, Petting the Text, or the Relations of Text and Body in *The Black Piano*” deals with the relation of text and body in Katalin Baráth’s novel, comparing the book with *The Pillow Book* (1996), film directed by Peter Greenaway. It is not easy to compare the different mediums of film and novel, but the plots of each show significant similarities and differences. *The Black Piano* is built on texts: the main protagonist works in a book shop; loves literature and writes her own novel; the crimes are committed being based on a poem; the investigator becomes the reader of clues, and in the end, in an erotic scene, the crime along with the bodies of the lovers, becomes uncovered. While in *The Pillow Book* the act of writing gets erotic features, in *The Black Piano* the textual level is more important than the erotic features.

The relation of text and body can also be seen in the relation of women with the society. Women are read like books by the misogynist society, but the main protagonist decides to become the *writer* of her own life.

All in all, I think that despite the problematic story of the Hungarian crime fiction and the marginalized situation of the feminist discourse in comparison to the elitist literature, Katalin Baráth managed to create a functional genre, in the sense that it is well written, entertaining and historically informative, which is valuable even if it is posited outside the Hungarian literary canon.

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