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The Molnár's lawsuits and their effects –

in the context of reception and institutional history

Doctoral Theses (PhD)

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Background of the research, problem identification

The purpose of my dissertation is to provide a new perspective on the research of Ferenc Molnár. In my thesis I discuss Molnár's theatre associated lawsuits, and inspect their dramaturgic and play tradition-related effects. The main focus of the dissertation are two lawsuits, the impact of which became permanent in literature- and theatre history. One of these is the case of Vígszínház, which takes care of the question of usage, and non-usage of works written by Molnár, the latter is the lawsuit of the French perfume company, Chanel, which is a debate of integration of authorial works. In my dissertation I intended to contextualize the two lawsuits, while also paying special attention to discussing their impacts from several aspects.

Providing detailed and exact data for the analysis and explanation of the debates offers a new perspective to review the oeuvre. My researches could well contribute to the unique method of analysis of the professional curriculum so as getting to understand one of the important phases of the Molnár's oeuvre. Expanding and clarifying of the biography is especially important in case of the Molnár's research, because in available sources pathosian stories and legends can often be found; the clarification of these is an impactful step of getting to know better Molnár's professional path, although this essentially requires an attempt different from the already existing ones. By introducing these lawsuits, we are able to gain further

knowledge on the connection between the author and *Vígyszínház*: on the nature of this cooperation, effects of it and its less analyzed issues.

My work also discusses questions of reception history and play tradition. The center of the dissertation is a phase of Molnár's life which has key-importance and its effect in literature and theatre studies is felt to this very day. I think research of the literary and theatre historic aspects of the Molnár's lawsuits is especially important, since the debates are about a well-known figure of Hungarian writer and his works. Molnár Ferenc is part of the national, and also the international canon, his plays was and still are often played in theatres. This fact indicates his fame of his time, and by the fact that at his premieres, his plays were simultaneously performed on several stages all around the world, and were welcomed by great success.

Some Molnár's lawsuits are proven to be a key state of the development of Hungarian copyright besides affecting Molnár's prestige as a play writer. Because of these, the topic of the dissertation brings up many of the questions regarding his impact history – for example the relationship of the theatre and its play writer, impact of debates on other writers, and the national controlling protocol of copyright. The topic of my thesis, combining the three disciplines, thus offers a new research perspective from both literary- and theatre history perspectives, and its approach may also provide a new starting point for future studies.

Research methods

As a priority, in my thesis I compared three types of sources: reports published in magazines and daily newspapers, and their additional archived and lawsuit records, paying special attention to court sentence on all three instance, in case of the two lawsuits, and inspecting the environmental law, texts of the Molnár's plays, and the director edition of the play titled *Játék a bíróság*on. According to these, I have put the progress of the lawsuits into chronological order,¹ and researched how did it affect Molnár's works and the theatre history and play tradition related development of the mentioned texts – especially using aspects of filologic, dramaturgic, literary copyright as well as institutional history, there as giving fresh perspective on the Molnár's research.

My prior source related to my dissertation is the Molnár's correspondence, and the available sources of the lawsuits, and of course relations of the literary – and theatre historic questions of the works of Molnár.

The core of my dissertation contains the explanation of the discovered Molnár's lawsuits, that I later expanded with their literary– and theatre historic, reception – and institution historic effects, which requires a different method from the ones mentioned above, and an appropriate idea of criticism, in this case caused by the nature and the wider hints of contextualization, one must own an exquisite level of

¹ This research methodological exercise was an important step in the face of misdated contemporary journal publications and uncategorised archival holdings.

knowledge on the Molnár's works. This is also complemented by the play written in 1962 that is titled *Játék a bíróságon*.² For the reception historic inspection of the works I have reviewed the periodicals, critics of the time, Molnár's monographs and studies related to the Molnár's research. For the understanding of the legal context of lawsuits, it was necessary to be familiar with the articles of copyright 1884. XVI.; 1921. LIV. just as much as the studies of the legal decisions on all of the three instance of both lawsuits.

² For this I have taken as a basis the director's copy in the OSzK: KÁRPÁTHY, ORBÓK, *Játék a bíróságon* avagy a Molnár-ügy, OSzK, SzT, MM 21.161.

Research results

The purpose of the Molnár's research was to introduce a new horizon of understanding, in which I have inspected the Molnár's lawsuits and their effects. The importance of Molnár as a play writer in case the literature and theatre history of the first half of the 20th century is beyond dispute.

In my conclusions, the effects of the Molnár's cases were obvious on many levels. In my thesis I have researched how the Vígszínház's lawsuit did become practice of courts. I have reviewed in a theatre historic, and detailed institutional aspect the Molnár season that was brought to stage at the time of the Vígszínház's lawsuit, and also the reception history of *Játék a bíróságon avagy a Molnár-ügy*, in critical understanding I inspected the scientific debates of the phase that came after the lawsuits were closed, and tangentially mentioned the phase after the non-playing times.

In order to understand oeuvre of Ferenc Molnár it is necessary to be familiar with the literary - and theatrical history of context, although in my dissertation of research, to provide a more complex perspective on the biography, I brought in another science, law history. I assume, the thesis has an important role in completing the Molnár's biography, as well as offering help to previous Molnár's researches, which final goal is to place Molnár Ferenc in the Hungarian literary and theatrical canon.

With this thesis I wished to contribute in extending the Molnár's oeuvre by dramaturgic analysis and play tradition related

explorations. After giving a necessary explanation on the theatrical history, I presented the ongoing lawsuit between Molnár and Vígszínház in great detail, and the legal debate with the perfume company Chanel, and lastly I have researched their effects on Hungarian reception history, in the phase following the end of the trials, paying special attention to *Játék a bíróságon avagy a Molnár-ügy*.

Molnár and the lawsuit of Vígszínház

The most interesting and less analyzed aspect of the professional relationship between Molnár and Vígszínház is very probably the years-long legal debate between them. There were no previous examples of a play writer suing a theatre, which he is a domestic writer of. Thereupon, he presented *Játék a kastélyban* in 1926, and *Olympia* in 1928 in Magyar Színház, which can be seen as a consequence of the lawsuit. I discuss the trial in great detail, and on the court of all three instance whereas a sentence has been made, adding some of its manuscripts and press related sources. At the end of the paragraph I mention the 1928/1929 season, the so-called “Molnár’s season” which was an agreement beyond legal trial. Last but not least I present the besides on theatrical history that is mentioned above, what other effects did the lawsuit had according to different aspects, and how did it became practice of courts.

Molnár and the Chanel No 8th debate

In 1930, when the trial with Vígszínház was still in progress, the French company Chanel sued the writer for mentioning their fragrances in an offensive context compared to their competitor's, Molyneux's products in 1929 while performing his play, *Egy, kettő, három* in Vígszínház. Since there was no previous example in case of national restrictions, the court had no practice developed by the time. The debate also elongated until a curial decision, in my dissertation I discuss decision made on the court of all three instances. The two lawsuits connects in time by the beginning of the Chanel-trial, which makes the research even more interesting and exciting from a scientific point of view.

Effects of the Molnár's lawsuits

In the end, by presenting the literary historic importance of the Molnár's lawsuits, I inspect their effects, paying special attention to the reception history in Hungary in the phase following the trials, as well as I mention a piece from a new, nontraditional (but not unique) literary aspect, which even though was not written by Molnár, it was inspired by him, and which reflects on lawsuits as well. This is the play called *Játék a bíróságon* that was written only after Molnár's death, and however its original purpose was the rehabilitation of the Molnár's play, theoretically it does fit in the line of the Molnár's trials as well.

Final Conclusions

The relevance of the dissertation has key importance regarding the Molnár's research, since the copyright guarding his oeuvre expires at 31.12.2022. In close connection with this there is the shared work of the theatres and the Molnár's researchers, which is the preserving, renewing and creating a new kind of cult of acceptance for the understanding of the Molnár's works.

For the goals mentioned above, it is necessary not only the biographic discussion of the curriculum but the expansion of it, since the Molnár's oeuvre is full of legends that came to life by the press, and on the other hand by the remaining stories of family and friends. The inspection of the curriculum requires an entirely new perspective, which besides the ordinary critical templates can succeed a fresh point of view.³

It also draws attention to the importance of Ferenc Molnár. In the years following Molnár's death, critics tried to marginalise his plays from the domestic stage, but as I mentioned, there is a revival of the play tradition and new theatrical efforts today. On the whole, that there are still many tasks awaiting Molnár's researchers, so as this dissertation contributes to that.

³ The foreign play tradition has not been interrupted!- György NAGY, *Molnár Ferenc a világsiker útján* (Budapest: Tinta, 2001), 10.

Publication activity

KARÁCSONY Szilvia. „Molnár Ferenc nőalakjai »sikerdrámáiban «”. In *SZITU Kötet*, szerk. DOMA Petra, 110–122. Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Collegium, 2022.

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KARÁCSONY Szilvia. „Ismerős ismeretlen Budapesten, Molnár Ferenc századfordulós budapesti novellái”. – Közlésre elfogadott 2020. február, „Álarcokat hordunk, édes barátom” Konferencia Cholnoky Viktor 150. születésnapja alkalmából készülő tanulmánykötetében.