

PÁZMÁNY PÉTER CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY - FACULTY OF  
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

**The peoples and cultures of the Post-Soviet space in Polish non-  
fiction literature**

Doctoral dissertation summary

Author: **Németh Orsolya**  
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Doctoral School of Literary Studies  
Slavic Studies Programme

Head of the doctoral school: **Dr. Hargittay Emil DSc, professor**  
Supervisor: **dr. habil. Pálfalvi Lajos, chair of the department,**  
**associate professor**

## **I. Background and research questions**

One of the defining characteristics of the Polish literature scene of the last three decades is the spread of the so-called reportage literature. The genre has been present in Poland for centuries, but 1989 marks a turning point and at the same time the beginning of a boom in its popularity. One of the causes of this was the elimination of the system of taboos associated with censorship after the fall of communism, opening up new spaces for the reporter-writers in regards to topics available for discussion. Another one is the spread of television and the Internet, which made the flash reports of the traditional media obsolete, thus forcing the reporter-writers into portraying that which is unseen by the cameras and unheard by the microphones. Concurrently, the end of communism in Poland brought an increased interest on the one hand in the past and Polish identity, and, on the other, in the peoples and cultures of the Soviet Union, and the genre of reportage turned out to be ideally suited to the portrayal of both.

The countries of the former Soviet Union are barely known for the average Pole, Hungarian or European. Certain Polish literary reportages were aiming to fill that blank, which piqued my interest at the beginning of my research into the genre. At the start of this study, works concerning more distant, more “exotic” countries or regions were in the majority, while countries neighbouring Poland (Ukraine, Belarus) were markedly underrepresented. The events of the last few years, especially the war in Ukraine, however, have triggered a change

in priorities, underscoring the fact that reportage literature is one of the most dynamically developing genres in Poland.

Furthermore, examining the Soviet Union and its successor, the Russian Federation as an empire raises the question of how and to what degree does imperial identity survive in the successor states. This topic is closely linked to the theory of Post-Colonialism and its application regarding the relations between the Soviet Union and its former member states. Consequently, I studied diverse theories regarding Russian imperialism, together with classical and Soviet colonialism and post-colonialism.

As a point of departure, I took the last work which saw the Soviet Union as a single country, Ryszard Kapuściński's *Imperium*, followed by an examination of works which cover the whole region and the manner in which their reporter-writers (Krystyna Kurczab-Redlich, Jacek Hugo-Bader, Waclaw Radziwinowicz) portray the former Empire, after which I delve into the depiction of the peoples and cultures of the former Soviet Union, divided into broader geographical regions. These are the following: Northern and Southern Caucasus (based on the reportages of Wojciech Jagielski, Wojciech Górecki, Krystyna Kurczab-Redlich, Małgorzata Nocuń and Andrzej Brzeziecki), Siberia (Piotr Milewski, Andrzej Dybczak és Michał Książek), and finally, Ukraine and Belarus (as shown in the non-fiction works of Grzegorz Szymanik, Igor T. Miecik, Paweł Pieniążek, Małgorzata Nocuń and Andrzej Brzeziecki).

## II. Methodology

The primary sources of this thesis consist of Polish reportages concerning the former Soviet Union, however, it must be added that the quantity of available works made it impossible to attempt completeness, therefore I selected those books that judged the most relevant for the examined topic (the individual geographical regions) of each chapter. The selection is subjective to a certain degree by necessity, however, the omitted works offer the opportunity for further research.

In addition, I used various theoretical and historical studies in order to shed some light on the background of facts and events presented in the examined reportages. I used, above all else, Mariusz Szczygieł's Polish non-fiction anthology in three volumes to introduce the genre of Polish reportage literature and its history. For the review of theories and concepts regarding the Russian Empire, I relied principally on the papers of the Polish historian, prof. Andrzej Nowak. In regard to post-colonial theory, beyond the "classics" - i.e. the works of Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Leela Gandhi - I also used the texts of researchers and writers studying the Soviet variant of post-colonialism (Ewa M. Thompson, Mykola Riabchuk, Ihar Babkou, Dariusz Skórczewski and David Chioni Moore). Lastly, the opportunity presented itself in certain cases to draw a parallel between the examined reportages and widely known, classical literary works. Consequently, this paper moves across the borders of pure literary science, and should be considered instead as interdisciplinary

research, since a certain amount of background knowledge in culture, history, sociology and history of ideas is indispensable to understanding the subject.

During the research of the examined works I concentrated predominantly on to what extent imperial thinking, its remains, or the desire for imperial greatness are perceptible in the case of individual peoples, together with to what degree can the relations of the examined successor states with Russia (Moscow) be framed within the context of (post-)colonialism. Furthermore, I also sought to illuminate how Polish reporter-writers depict these countries, peoples, cultures which are less well-known and often considered as exotic, and how this depiction attempts to dispel the negative stereotypes formulated by the Russian imperial narrative.

### **III. New results**

This paper can be considered a gap filler as no comprehensive study affording a picture of Polish reportage, one of the most dynamic and popular literary genres of Poland, has been published in Hungary thus far.

First of all, this paper is the first to introduce the genre of Polish reportage and its history, or, at least, its key moments. In the second place, the study, based on works of Polish reportage, sheds light on the variety of peoples inhabiting this immense region, which cannot be considered uniformly Russian (similarly to the failure to develop

the Soviet Human, the *homo sovieticus*). These peoples were so far mostly known from the classic works of Russian literature, the authors of which, driven by a feeling of imperial superiority, developed a markedly negative picture of their subjects, while Polish reportage works, through this study, offer a more nuanced image. Furthermore, this paper is the first to examine these countries and their relations toward Moscow in the context of imperialism and imperial identity.

Moreover, there is scarcity of specialised literature in Hungary (and by Hungarian authors) concerning the Soviet or East Central European variety of post-colonialism, the application of post-colonial theory to the region and the adequacy of the above mentioned application. This paper compiles and compares works with this particular focus.

#### **IV. Publications related to the research topic**

Németh, O. 2014. „Csak erős idegzetűeknek” (Jacek Hugo-Bader: Fehér láz, Kolimai napló) In: Szláv TeXtus, 2014.07.04.

Retrieved from:

[http://szlavltextus.blog.hu/2014/07/04/\\_csak\\_eros\\_idegzetueknek\\_jacek\\_hugo-bader\\_feher\\_laz\\_kolimai\\_naplo%20](http://szlavltextus.blog.hu/2014/07/04/_csak_eros_idegzetueknek_jacek_hugo-bader_feher_laz_kolimai_naplo%20)

Németh, O. *A lengyel riport az új skandináv krimi?* In: Könyves Magazin, 2015/1, ISSN 2063-2614, p. 53-56.

Németh, O. 2015. Szülőházánk, Közép-Európa In: Zelei, D. (ed.) *Világtalanul? Világirodalom-kritika Magyarországon*, Budapest: FISZ-Jelenkor, ISBN 978-963-7043-68-0, p. 409-414.

Németh, O. 2016. Kapuściński után. A lengyel riport a XXI. században. In: Horváth, Cs., Papp, Á. K. Török, L. (eds.) *Párhuzamok, történetek. Tanulmányok a kortárs közép-európai regényről*. Budapest: L'Harmattan, ISBN 978-963-414-160-0, p.153-159.

### **Accepted for publication**

Németh, O. (accepted). A Birodalom a kóbor kutya perspektívájából. In: Horváth, Cs., Papp, Á. K. (eds.) *Test-identitás-történelem* (postconference publication volume)

Németh, O. (accepted). Fikció nélkül – Csecsenföld és a lengyel tényirodalom. In: Horváth, Cs., Papp, Á. K. (eds.) *Valóság és módszer* (postconference publication volume)