

dissertation author: Maciej Sagata, MSc

supervisor: Bożenna Bojar, PhD, DSc, ProfTit

associate supervisor: Csilla Gizińska, PhD

Abstract of the doctoral dissertation:
BOVARYSME AND MELANCHOLY
IN CONTEMPORARY HUNGARIAN LITERATURE

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The dissertation consists of two main parts: theoretical and research.

The theoretical part includes a detailed discussion of the concept of bovarysme – its origins, history and applications in the humanities.

Bovarysme, or, according to the most popular definition, 'the ability to imagine oneself different than one is', is a psychological phenomenon coined and described at the turn of the 20th century by the French philosopher Jules de Gaultier. The term first appears in his essay *Le bovarysme. La psychologie dans l'oeuvre de Flaubert (Bovarysme. Psychology in Flaubert's Work)* (1892). According to de Gaultier, most of Flaubert's characters suffer from an affliction consisting of an imbalance between their actual intellectual capacities (intellectual bovarysme) or emotional capacities (sentimental bovarysme) and their ideas about themselves. These perceptions are drawn – in the most classic case of Emma Bovary (and, before her, Don Quixote) – from books, but can also be induced through inappropriate upbringing/education or any other medium (for example, social networks or marketing).

Bovarysme is most often treated as a negative and pathological phenomenon – in this approach, it can be visualised as two lines starting from a single point (the moment of a person's birth), where the first line is the real world and innate abilities, and the second line represents the desires bred by society, education or authority, i.e. the image of what and who one would like to be. Too much of an angle between these lines (the inability to realise desires) heralds disaster – when fantasies clash with reality and disillusion occurs, one's personality may disintegrate or, in extreme cases, one may commit suicide.

Bovarysme, in neutral (positive) terms, is no longer just the 'ability' to imagine oneself different from what one is, but a 'power' or 'authority', given to men by nature and enabling the development of both desirable and undesirable personality traits. This broadening

understanding of bovarysme is the basis and sine qua non for the education of individuals and the formation (as well as differentiation) of society.

The broadest understanding of bovarysme is fundamental bovarysme, which is founded on the extension of the bovaristic mechanism from the creation of the self to the creation of the world. According to de Gaultier, all sensory perception is affected by bovarysme, and as it is the only perception that is universally available to us, the whole world is a relative, more or less intersubjectivised, but almost always in some way false, image (construct), it is 'als ob' (after Hans Vaihinger) – constantly shaking in its foundations, fluctuating between fiction, hypothesis and dogma.

Bovarysme can also apply to social, ethnic or national groups – as a result of their fascination with another custom or tradition, they then begin to see themselves as different from what they are. This mechanism is what de Gaultier calls collective bovarysme. The concept of collective bovarysme then found its way into the instrumentarium of researchers of the postcolonial movement (or provided inspiration for them): Arnold van Gennep, Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha or Alexander Kiossev.

The theory of bovarysme is also used more or less directly by René Girard (the 'triangle of the mimetic desire') and Pierre Bourdieu (bovarysme as a social game) in their works. The dissertation also discusses the connections between bovarysme and selected philosophical and sociological concepts: with Richard Dawkins' memetics, Richard Rorty's neopragmatism or Zygmunt Bauman's liquid reality.

The theoretical part of the dissertation also includes a discussion of the relationship between bovarysme and melancholy, and more specifically: the way in which bovarysme can provide an explanation for the cause of the development of certain cases of melancholy (via mechanism based on mourning the loss of the imagined self). The direct inspiration for bringing these two concepts together and exploring their mutual impact came from reading a text by Giorgio Agamben. It should be noted, however, that Agamben does not use the word 'bovarysme' explicitly anywhere and does not refer directly to de Gaultier's concept (he uses mainly Sigmund Freud's works). Description of this phenomenon, coining the term „bovaristic melancholy” and putting into the limelight the affinity of bovarysme with melancholia (with a little help from Freud) may be seen as one of the innovative elements of the dissertation.

The research section contains an analysis of selected texts from Hungarian contemporary literature. The texts were selected to show the functioning of bovarysme and bovaristic melancholy in Hungarian culture. The following works were analysed:

- *In the Godforsaken Hinterlands: A Tale of Provincial Hungary* by Zsigmond Móricz [lack of individual and collective bovarysme mechanisms in the province (small town) as a bitter diagnosis of backwardness in the field of Hungarian cultural development at the turn of the 20th century; discussion of the novel in the light of Alexander Kiossev concept of self-colonisation],

- *The Greatest Baroque Metaphysical Poet of a Small City on the Great Plain* by András Cserna-Szabó [small-town individual bovarysme mixed with collective bovarysme is not a recipe for successful modernisation, but is rather a source of suffering and melancholy; analysis of the (anti)bovarysme of the main character; analysis of the Szentés (small city) literary field using Pierre Bourdieu's methodology],
- László Krasznahorkai's *Melancholy of Resistance* [the tragic dimension of individual and collective bovarysme in a small town, the eternal East/West (centre/periphery) opposition; (post)colonial mimicry; discussion of the titular melancholy of resistance resulting from the main characters' antibovarysme; the struggle of the part against the whole and its overcoming through interpersonal relations (Lévinas)],
- Mihály Babits's *The Stork Caliph* [split self as a curious case of pure individual bovarysme; the melancholy of anonymous big cities and the identities lost therein; suicide as a result of disillusionment with oneself],
- Péter Esterházy's *The Book of Hrabal* [a book that "imagines itself different than it is", or transtextual metabovarysme; bovarysme as a "textually transmitted disease"; the asymptote of literary imitation as a source of melancholy].

M. Cserna-Szabó