

The Role of European Culture in the Curricula of Hungarian Secondary Schools

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1. European culture in the Hungarian curricula until 1950.

Starting from the 17th century till 1918 Hungary first became part of the *Habsburg Empire* and later that of the *Austro-Hungarian Monarchy*, and as such it was an integral part of Europe. Its educational policy, curricula and educational practice did not differ from other European countries. Education was *in the hands of the church* until the 70th of the 18th century. The majority of catholic schools used the *books and curricula of Jesuit schools of Europe*, while protestants followed the German (Prussian), Dutch and Swiss models. In catholic schools the *language of instruction was Latin*, therefore the school-books used elsewhere in Europe did not need to be translated and could be used immediatly. A series of books were written by the best Hungarian scholars who were educated in the West and could base their work on the common European culture and adept it to the traditions and history of the East-Central-European area.

The *government controll* of education began wth the publication of *Ratio Educationis* (the first Education Law of Hungary) in 1777 when all catholic church controled schools had to adopt a *centrally planed compulsory curriculum*, which was supervised by school-inspectors. Education in Hungary remained under strong goverment controll from then onwards, exept in the cases of *protestant schools* who enjoyed more *independece* as a minority since 1781, the decree of Kaiser Franz Joseph II. of Habsburg's Law of Tolerance. In Calvinist schools the language of instruction was Hungarian, in Lutheran schools mainly German. The curriculum of *Ratio Educationis* was *modelled after French and Prussian counterparts* both in concept and content. The main territory of *teaching literature* were the classical languages, *Latin and Greek*. There ratio was about 1/3 of the whole timetable.

During the 19th century the most important development was that the language of instruction became Hungarian instead of Latin that put the national minorities at a disadvantage. After 1867 when the Habsburg Empire became Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, a New Education Law and Curriculum were introcued in 1879. This curriculum was the first that established the school subject: Hungarian Language and Literature. The main field of teaching European literature were the classical and modern languages, especially Greek, Latin and German. The main teaching topics of the subject Hungarian Language and Literature were the mothertongue and Hungarian authors. In seven out of eight grades the ruling method of teaching Hungarian literarture was reading texts in some biographical context, introducing the basic stylistical, rhetorical concepts (for instance: symbols and figures of speech) in line with Latin and Greek studies. In the 8th grade it was followed by a chronological summary of the History of Hungarian Literature.

GRADES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL
SUBJECTS									
Hungarian	6	5	3	4	3	3	3	3	30
History	-	-	4	3	3	3	2	3	18
Geography	4	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	10
Latin	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	5	49
Greek	-	-	-	-	5	5	5	4	19
German	-	-	4	3	3	3	3	2	18
Mathematics	3	4	3	3	4	3	3	2	23
Geometry	3	3	2	2	-	-	-	-	10
Natural sc.I.	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4	8
Nat. Sc. II.	-	-	-	3	2	3	-	-	8
Religion	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	16
Philosophy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Calligraphy	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Physical Ed.	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	16
Lesson/week	28	28	28	28	30	30	30	30	

This school-system prevailed even after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with some corrections **up to the end of World War II**.

2.The main trends of the era between 1945-1978

The most important result of the Parliamentary democracy in Hungary between **1945-1948** was that it raised the age limit of compulsory education to 14 instead of 12. The establishment of an 8 grade public school at this time can be considered as an important step towards the foundation of the structure of a quality mass education.

During the totalitarian dictatorship of the Stalin era (**1949-56**) education began to move away from the Western standards. During this period the educational government tried to banish everything that reminded people of the West. With the classical and modern European languages the European (world) literature almost entirely disappeared from the curriculum. Paradoxically it was then that a special concept of the subject Hungarian Literature was formed. The first sign of change was an implementation of some titles of foreign writers into the centrally planned curriculum as obligatory teaching material. First these writers were mainly Russians (L.N.Tolstoy who was appreciated by Lenin, and some Soviet writers as Mayakovsky, Sholokhov etc.). **After 1956 (Hungarian revolution)** more and more Western writers too began to appear in the curriculum, especially the great realists who were accepted by Marx and Lukacs (such as Balzac etc.).

The first real change occurred after the introduction of the ***Education Law and Curriculum 1964***. It was a kind of returning to the traditional European character of Hungarian education. The ratio of the modern European Languages was raised, political indoctrination became less direct, and this was the time when the special concept of teaching Hungarian literature was really formed. From this time on the centrally planned and compulsory (4 grade) secondary school curriculum of the school subject Hungarian Literature not only included the history of Hungarian literature, but also the history of the European (world) literature. Authors such as Homer, Sophokles, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Audelaire, Tolstoy, Thomas Mann have become part of compulsory teaching material ever since.

This trend became predominant in the *1978 curriculum*. At this time the percentage of world literature became 50% or in some grades even more. From this time on the chronological order did not mean a one-sided literary historical approach to the works of art. The historical, literary historical approach to the works of art. The historical, literary historical, biographical data only formed the context for a wider understanding of the text. The curricula, and especially the text books, recommended a manyfolded text analysis, using the methods and concepts of Russian formalism, new criticism, structuralism, post-structuralism etc.

3. European culture in the 1978 and 1985 curricula

On behalf of the position of European culture in the subject of Hungarian literature in the 1978 and 1985 curricula of secondary schools, which are currently used, we focus on three elements: **1. the curricula** of Gymnasiums and vocational high schools (age 14-18), **2. the role of European culture at the final examination** of Hungarian Literature in the secondary school and **3. the role of European culture in entrance examinations to universities**.

3.1. The Curricula: Let us see firstly for example the teaching material for the first grade of secondary high schools and gymnasiums (age 14):

I. Chapter: *Introduction to aesthetics* (about 12 lessons)

Main concepts to be covered are: *art, reality fiction, narration, artistic reflexion, the comic, sarcasm, irony, the grotesque, the tragic*, values in the literary discourse (an axiological approach to works of art) etc.

Obligatory texts: an Isaac Babel short story, a Rilke poem, three Hungarian short stories, 2 Hungarian poems

II. Chapter: *The literature of the Ancient Times* (18 lessons)

1. *Kalevala* (excerpts)

2. The *Gilgames* epos (excerpts)

3. The *Old Testament* (excerpts)

4. Ancient Greek literature (Homer: *The Odyssey* <whole text>; Sophocles: *Antigone* <whole text>; poems by Sappho, Simonides, Anacreon)

5. Roman authors (poems by Catull, Ovid, Horace, Virgil, excerpts from the *Aeneid*).

III. Chapter: *The literature of the Middle Ages* (10 lessons)

Obligatory texts: 3 songs from the *Carmina Burana*, 2 poems by Walter von der Vogelweide, a hymn by Iacopone da Todi and St. Francesco di Assissi, 3 ballads by Villon, excerpts from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, excerpts from the Hungarian codices. The New Testament and the early Christian authors (a short excerpt from Confessions by Saint Augustin)

IV. Chapter: *The literature of the Renaissance* (18 lessons)

Obligatory texts: a poem by Petrarca, a short story by Boccaccio, *Romeo and Juliet* and/or *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, 5-5 poems of two Hungarian poets (Janus Pannonius, Balassi Bálint)

V. Chapter: *The literature of Baroque Age* (8 lessons)

A cultural historical outline (fine arts, literature: Tasso, Ariosto, John Donne, Milton, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Calderón, Góngora)

Obligatory texts: excerpts from a Hungarian baroque epos (Zrinyi), 2-3 letters by Mikes Kelemen, 3-4 poems of the period.

In the material of the *first year* of this school there only four-five Hungarian literary themes are included. The rest of the material deals with European literature, as you can see, starting from Ancient times through the Renaissance and Baroque in chronological order. *In the second and third year* the amount of European literature changes but never falls under 35 percent. The compulsory reading in later years includes such works as Voltaire: *Candide*, from works of Swift, excerpts from Goethe: *Faust*, *Michael Kohlhaas* by Kleist, a short story by E.T.A. Hoffmann, Kafka, Thomas Mann, poems by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Apollinaire, Mayakovsky, T.S.Eliot, *Eugen Onegin* by Pushkin, novels by Balzac, Stendhal, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Camus, Bulgakov, a drama by Ibsen, Chekhov, Brecht, Dürrenmatt, Beckett, and some other titles by choice

Students attending *vocational high schools* have a curriculum with similar concept, but it includes less material especially of translated literature. We can, however, conclude that in Hungary this curriculum with a great amount of European literature is required for everyone who intends to take the final examination of the secondary school, take a high school certificate and enter higher education.

3.2. Final examination: While the compulsory curriculum of Hungarian Literature in secondary schools specifies about 35-50% of European literature, for **final examination** (at the age 18) Hungarian literary themes are predominant. The **currently** required **24 topics** of examination in literature that are prescribed by the Ministry of Education include **19 Hungarian and 5 European titles** only. This *change* occurred *in recent years* because the ratio used to be 50-50% between 1980-87, and marked the winds of the changing regime. Some intellectual circles before the democratic election of 1990 had an effect on the last communist government in raising the percentage of Hungarian titles at the final examination. They took the general European practice as their model. Indeed, there are few European countries where teaching national literature includes as many titles of translated literature as is the case in Hungary. The present conservative government has left this new ratio intact in the last two years.

3.3. Entrance examinations in literature. Students entering *law schools and schools of art* have to take entrance examination in literature. In both schools the material of the exams contains the high school curriculum both in material and proportion, with equal emphasis put on European and national literature. In the Law School of the University of Budapest (ELTE) for example, there are **33 oral exam titles** that include **13 European and 20 Hungarian** literature questions. We can see, however, from the following list that each of these 13 questions includes so many authors that it out number of Hungarian literature titles:

1. The beginning of the epic (The Epos of *Gilgames*, *The Bible*, *The Kalevala*)
2. Literature of the Antiquity (*Homer*)
3. The development of European drama (*Sophokles*, *Shakespeare*, *Molière*, *Ibsen*, *Chekhov* and *Brecht*)
4. The representation of the medieval world concept in European literature (*Dante*, *Villon*)
5. Renaissance in European literature (*Petrarca*, *Boccaccio*, *Shakespeare*)
6. The ideas of European Enlightenment in European Literature (*Swift*, *Voltaire*, *Rousseau*)
7. The characteristics of Romanticism in European Literature (taken from examples)
8. Fiction in the first part of the 19th century (*Balzac*, *Stendhal*, *Gogol*)
9. Realism in the 19th century (Optional: *Tolstoy*, *Dostoyevsky*, *Chekhov*, *Flaubert* etc.)
10. The development of modern lyrics in the world literature of the second half of the 19th century (*Whitman*, *Baudelaire*, *Verlaine*, *Rimbaud*)

11. Literature of the 20th century (Optional: *Thomas Mann, Kafka, Babel, Camus, Hrabal*, etc.)
12. The literature of the avantgarde (for example: *Apollinaire, Mayakovsky*, and other poets by choice)
13. World literature today – Based on choice of individual readings

Comparing these titles with the secondary school curriculum, we can see that almost all the main topics of that curriculum, that dealt with European literature, are included in the entrance examination of the Law Schools.

3.4. Summarizing interpretation of the curricula 1964-1990

Summarizing interpretation of the curricula before the new era of the parliamentary democracy comes out as follows:

The **percentage of European culture** in the Hungarian curricula of secondary schools was fairly large from 1964 onward and grew even more after 1978. The reason behind this change was that the Hungarian public opinion never ceased to consider the country as part of Europe and demanded at least an “*intellectual return*” to the rest of the continent. This is how a concept unparalleled in Europe originated especially in the field of teaching Hungarian Language and Literature. This is the reason why this subject includes a history of European literature with a great number of obligatory titles of translated literature. On the other hand this concept became *an obstacle to the modernization of the curriculum and teaching methods*. The huge amount of academic material consolidated the central role of the teacher in the teaching-learning process; class teaching remained the leading method in classrooms instead of pair and group work, and a highly *elitist* idea of secondary level education was maintained. Centrally planned curricula prescribing almost 80% of the teaching material gave *no real autonomy to schools, teachers and pupils*.

4. After the establishment of a parliamentary democracy

The role of European culture in the curriculum after the establishment of a parliamentary democracy in Hungary (*from 1990*) has changed. The main trend of the changes can be specified as follows: A centrally planned curriculum and the compulsory school material *will soon be replaced by a corriculum* that opens the way to many local curricula in line with general European practice. In a *paradoxical* way the return to Europe in politics in the field of education will mean a significant reduction of teaching material and as a result a remarkable *decrease in knowledge of European culture, authors, titles, works of art, history*, etc. By following the European trend of progress this kind of change is unavoidable. On the other hand *modern teaching methods* which have been suppressed by the academic and elitist teaching material *may now gain ground*.

When we, however, read the *latest draft of the National Curriculum under work* that still recommends, but does not prescribe, a large number of European titles for the Hungarian Language and Literature, one may *doubt* if the changes will really be so fundamental as the minister of education claims. Especially if you know that the *requirements of the final and the entrance examinations are the same*.

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