

**A brief historical overview of the reception of Dostoevsky's works  
in the crises of 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungary**

– summary –

It can be observed in every decade of the 20th-century history of Dostoevsky's reception in Hungary that certain features of the patterns applied for the author and his most important works were inherited from the nineteenth century. The given feature depended on how the political and ideological criteria of the reigning political power changed the emphasis of interpretation.

The Dostoevsky cult was at its strongest in the 1920s and 30s in Hungary, and his works remained in the focus of attention until the mid-1940s. The universality of the Russian writer forced the Hungarian literature to face the fundamental questions of human existence. The historical background of this process was that the country struggled with finding its way after the losses of the First World War and the trauma of the Trianon peace treaty.

After 1945 the Marxist criticism of literature contrasted the ideals of socialist literature with Dostoevsky's art. However, in different periods of this era the interpretations of Dostoevsky's works could also be used for conveying conflicting messages, such as anti-capitalism or connecting his humanized, "tamed" faith with the concept of Socialist brotherhood.

Dostoevsky was a "serious problem" for the official cultural policy of the era, and so his works could only be published with explanations and comments. Limiting the classic Russian author's literary presence in 1945-1948 was the direct consequence of alignment with Soviet policy. The explanation for his banning in the period between 1948 and 1956 is the same – if the classic Russian writer was an "undesirable phenomenon" in the Soviet Union, then his works could not be published in Hungary either. After the death of Stalin and under the leadership of Khrushchev a thaw in political atmosphere in home and foreign affairs began in the Soviet Union, which resulted in similar changes in all Socialist countries dependant on the Soviet state. The evidence of change of attitude in the literary world is that after publishing Dostoevsky's works in Moscow in 1955, slowly and gradually more and more of his works were published in Hungary from 1956, and particularly from 1957. In the early Kádár-era those works saw the light of day first that were easier to interpret by the formal values and literary taste of the Socialist state, namely the early works of Dostoevsky and *Crime and*

*Punishment*. Naturally, these works were more and more accompanied by politically appropriate prologues and epilogues.

From the middle of the 1960s due to the gradual thawing of the political climate the impact of international trends – Dostoevsky's reception in Western Europe, the scientific works of the Russian intellectual elite, the new “Dostoyevsky-cult” started by Mikhail Bakhtin – could be perceived stronger and stronger in Hungary. Beside the studies of István Sőtér or Endre Török the renewed Marxist interpretations of Ferenc Fehér prove that the re-interpretation of Dostoevsky's works had an important, fertilizing role in the change of literary approach. As a result of the above process the rediscovery and re-interpretation of the works of the Russian writer started in the early 1960s. The intellectuals rediscovered Dostoevsky and the passion towards his works shows that Dostoevsky's art became timely again in the first half of 1960. This era of reforms, first perceived in the cultural and intellectual world (and resulting in Dostoevsky's literary renaissance) also brought economic and political changes. This process came to a halt in the early seventies – first in foreign policy, then in the economy. As a consequence, the cultural reforms which started in the second half of the 60s only continued in the area of public education in the following decades, resulting in educational and promotional approaches only.

The literary politics of the 1980s can be called much more permissive compared to the 1960s. Ideological expectations had been reduced, the role of science increased and it was easier to deal with “problematic” questions appearing in Dostoevsky's writings. However, the innovative literary ambitions of the sixties were not renewed in the interpretation of Dostoevsky's works. Through the promotional nature of interpretations and documentary narration more people could be reached, however the serious interpretation of Dostoevsky's works was not possible in these writings (political demands?).

After the change of regime in 1989, the Hungarian practice of publishing has changed so much in comparison to the era discussed above that the problems and concepts detailed earlier cannot be interpreted in the same context. The texts available for everyone are very diverse but works constituting real literary value are almost lost in the multitude of published books.

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