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István Petelei, the writer of the man-in-the-street in crisis? -

The changed feeling of existence at the end of the century in the short stories of István Petelei

I borrowed the title of my presentation from the study of Béla Németh G., who named István Petelei, the writer of the end of the 19th century, as the first determined representative of the man-in-the-street: '[Petelei] cares about the mentality, morality, sentimentalism, in one word: the spirituality, which drifts due to the changing cultural, conventional, of value impacts in the commoner and in the man-in-the-street, develops by influencing its vital strength.' Petelei – so to speak – is especially interested in the moment when a man gives up his previous life, will of life, moral behaviour, himself and doing so drifts not only from his own but from the others' »normal« regimen from the intensity of life itself." However it is clear from not only the prose of Petelei' but also from the whole short stories literature of the era that G. Béla Németh living at the end of the century interprets the crisis historically: in the collision of the old patterns settling onto the society and the new ones evolving under them all the members of the society suffer trauma. The previously considered to be absolute religious, ethical and national values became questioned and accidental and the short stories literature of the era brings out the uncertainty and the possibility of the human existence. In the interpretation of G. Béla Németh actually in the European cultural tradition the thought of the permanently present crisis has come to a head since Rousseau.

The changed feeling of existence at the end of the century and the turn of the century in the oeuvre of Petelei can be mostly found in the villager narratives discussing the moral conflicts. In the narratives of this kind Petelei's frequent sample is the ballad, in both his syllabus and his process of the narrative technique. The changing of the society reshaped the picture of the village so the typical, ballad-like situations pictured in the short stories do not have an obvious outcome. In my presentation analysing three short stories from Petelei (*Eszti Balogh has gone...*, *Peasant Shame*, *Two females*) I am trying to point out how the kind of crisis which ultimately stems from the experience of the transcendental homelessness is concretized in the analysed short stories and how István Petelei transforms the ballad structure in his short stories by the experience of existence at the end of the century.