

UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS  
„EDUCATION AND SOCIETY”  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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**LITERACY EDUCATION OF WOMEN  
AT THE HUNGARIAN REFORM ERA**

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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## **Introduction of the subject**

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the composition of the literary community and the reading audiences went through a dramatic change, and a previously unprecedented growth. These were the decades, when women, children and the members of lower social classes appeared among the participants of reading public. Specialized literature considers the turn of the century as the era of the reading revolution. This new kind of readership created new kind of demands, and overall, these often correlated (sometimes quite apparently) with political and/or national interests.

Reading became an organising subject of public discourse because of several factors. The Enlightenment, the newly centralized role of educational issues led to the inception of alphabetisation. More and more people became able to read, and by the achievements of the industrial revolution, the reading materials finally could reach their audience. New press techniques also revived the publication of books and newspapers. Thematic magazines facilitated the spread of light literature among an extended circle of readers, but their columns also hosted the ideas of Enlightenment as well as certain writings of political nature. Complemented by the revolution of reading, all these changes invoked a kind of reading fever. The thinkers of the era – upon realizing its potential jeopardies – discussed the selection of proper reading materials with an ever increasing frequency, while at the same time the publication of certain magazines that offered recommended literary works, was initiated. Therefore, the process of the literacy education of women did not stop at an institutional level, as it saturated the whole of public discourse instead. Press products became forums for education.

This doctoral thesis investigates the phenomenon of literacy education from a feminine perspective, according to education- and literacy history

aspects in the first half of the long 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Due to the diversity of the subject, the research focuses on – while also noting the changes that occurred at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century – Hungary at the age of Hungarian Reform Era. Besides the literacy education of women, the research also illustrates the women’s education history of the era, the cultural possibilities for women, and – at least in part – the scenes for feminine literary engagement. The objective of the study is to contribute to the extension of the horizon of women’s education, literacy history, hungaristic and social history research endeavours, as well as the expansion of the bridges of interdisciplinary links, by the inclusion and analysis of the selected resources.

### **Actuality of the subject**

Research endeavours regarding women’s history started to unfold due to the social and intellectual changes of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. (KÉRI, 2018) Although the systematic review of the works concerning literary- and social history already started at the second half of the 1920’s, their interpretation as basic resources was only initiated at the “founding era” of women’s history schools, during the 1970’s – and in Hungary, typically from the 1980’s. (PETŐ, 2003)

The interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches of women’s history research facilitate the reception of an ever extending range of knowledge about various stages of history (KÉRI, 2018), thus about the possibilities and the contemporary assessment of the cultural development of females and reading habits too. From the 1990’s, there is an ever growing emphasis on women’s education- and (feminine) literature history research initiatives, whose significant part analyses the long 19<sup>th</sup> Century, however,

the majority of these focuses on the age of dualism. According to my respective research so far, upon focusing on the Hungarian Reform Era, the works dealing with the literacy education of women are less typical, although not unprecedented. (POGÁNY, 2014) From the 2010's, the works dealing with women's history and women's literary history present an emerging tendency, and my dissertation also follows this research direction.

### **The issue of the research**

The issue of the research stems from the multidisciplinary approach possibilities concerning the literacy education of women. Although the main focus of the research was feminine education history, I also had to touch on and include the relevant outcomes of education history, literacy history, social history, literary history, literary theory, press history, book- and library history, gender studies and hungaristic research endeavours.

### **Research questions, hypotheses**

The research was conducted along the following hypotheses:

- The changes during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the literacy revolution also affected the cultural opportunities of women, thus reading can be interpreted as a deeper acquisition of knowledge and also as a new spare time activity.

- There are certain transformations concerning the themes and genres of reading materials for women. Besides (and instead of) the previous religious, biblical themes, education-advisory works and cookbooks, the focus shifted towards light literature reading materials and magazines.
- Periodicals pursued to undertake a kind of educational, directional role in the cultural practices of the new reading audience, thus exercising some kind of control over reading habits.
- The recommendations of the periodicals also attributed special importance to the works written in Hungarian language.
- The initial “prohibitive” tone of public discourse concerning female readers shifted towards a direction, which was “supportive among certain limitations”, upon realizing that the literacy of women represents an important role regarding the aspects of future generations and the impartation of national identity.
- The teaching traditions of the contemporary seminary institutions, which also included the acquisition of foreign (German and French) languages, presumably had a more powerful role in literacy education than the discourse of public sphere.
- Besides being important for education aspects, the literacy education of women also included further practical (patronage, market extension) benefits.

## **The structure of the dissertation**

Following the introduction of specialized literature- and methodological elements, this empirical research was organised around five important aspects. These were not only fundamental pillars for the planning of the research, but also for the structuring of the dissertation. The first three set of concerns incorporate secondary resources, the disclosure of antecedents in specialized literature and the synthesis of outcomes, while the latter two sets summarizes the analysis of primary resources and the new scientific research outcomes.

- Chapter „II. Social History Review”: social, political, idea-historical situation and changes; demographic, urbanisation data in European and Hungarian conjecture; ethnical and social relations in Hungary at the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century; national concepts; the effects of contemporary political relations over the public sphere and culture; Jacobin movement; language reform; feminine emancipation endeavours; public image of women.
- Chapter „III. On the Horizon of Women’s Education”: issues of the education in seminaries and women’s literacy development; feminine literacy ideals; learning opportunities; pursuits of the domestic women’s seminary institutions (with special focus on the seminary institute of Lilla Tánzer).
- Chapter „IV. On the Horizon of the Literacy Education of Women”: literary- and reading history foundations of the research; literacy revolution; the term of reading fever in international context; the

organisation of domestic – feminine – reading audiences during the ages of Enlightenment and Hungarian Reform Era; the society-transforming characteristics of literature; the operation of reading parlours and reading societies.

- Research Chapter „V. Press Debates about the Literacy Education of Women and Feminine Literacy Development”: reading history analysis of periodicals in the context of press history; discourse about the literacy education of women at non-institutional platforms. The research also considers periodical press activities as platforms of education.
- Research chapter „VI. Literacy Education of Women in the Genres of the Private Sphere”: reading- and education history analysis of the documents of the private sphere; investigation of a correspondence, as well as three Hungarian, and an English diary. The questions of research address the contemporary periodicals and their educational influences, as well as how the intentions of women’s seminary institutes could prevail in the reading practices of the diarist ladies.

## **Methodology**

- Exploration of relevant specialized literature in the context of the following aspects: educational- and cultural history; reading- and literary history; historical works. (Taking the specialized literature concerning the subject in the actual and the previous era into account, on an international basis).

- Establishment of resource groups
- Document analysis - periodicals, private documents (KÉRI, 2001)
- Discourse analysis (GLÓZER, 2007a-b; PÁLFI, 2010)
- Comparative collation

## **Resources**

Upon the allocation of the primary resources for the research, our purpose was to facilitate the investigation of the literacy education of women from several aspects, by the use of contemporary documents. The analysed resources were:

- Documents in Hungarian language,
- Texts published in printed form.

Concerning the collection of these, we would like to highlight the role of Arcanum Database.

As a novel scene of education, the periodicals became important resources for the analysis. An important requirement towards the selected press products was to represent literary and other social roles, and a relatively long issue period. Considering these aspects, Tudományos Gyűjtemény (Scientific Collection - 1817-1841) proved to be appropriate. As a kind of counterweight for the Tudományos Gyűjtemény, the Felső Magyar Országai Minerva (Minerva of Upper Hungary - 1825-1836) provided a relevant opportunity for comparative analyses. Other products of the prosperous newspaper publishing of the era – for example, certain articles of Honderú, Honművész or Pesti Divatlap – emerge in the framework of micro-research endeavours.

Concerning the documents of the private sphere, the research includes letters (Borbála Molnár and Krisztina Újfalvy - KÉRI, 2014; SOMKUTI, 1981)



and diaries (Antónia Kölcsey, Etelka Slachta, Júlia Szendrey). For the sake of international context and comparative perspective, the diary of Anne Lister was also included among the research resources. The limited availability of complete text bodies emerged as an issue concerning the texts of private sphere, however, owing to excerpts published in other research and biographical works, the resources became suitable for analysis.

### **Outcomes of the Research**

In the course of the investigation of the literacy education of women, beyond educational history perspective, it was necessary to consider several aspects of social-, literary- and education history research, as well as the changes occurring in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It became obvious that the issues of feminine literacy, and the literacy education of women at the Hungarian Reform Era cannot be discussed without the parallel of the – public – discourse concerning the education and cultural development of women at the first half of the long 19<sup>th</sup> Century, which also correlate with nationalizing-hungaristic endeavours, just as language reform and the diversification of literary-cultural life, as well as the demand for their development. The issue of women, the urge of feminine cultural development and the literacy education of women had an ever increasing significance in the pedagogical, educational and cultural discussions.

Public sphere, as a scene for informal education had a double function in literacy education:

- Discussion area for quill battles – including pedagogical, educational and legal issues,

- New forum for educational, learning (and spare time) possibilities, which beyond the task of recommending, also publishes reading materials.

In the course of the investigation of the articles, it became obvious that contemporary writers also sensed the harbinger of reading fever, while the frequent occurrence of foreign examples suggests that they were aware of how it unfolded in the western world.

### *Patriotism, patronage*

Following the Enlightenment, the intensifying feminine emancipation efforts required the redefinition of women and feminine roles in Hungary too. In the 1820's and 1830's, the issue of women revolved around the requirement system of feminine ideal – that was also linked to hungaristic efforts. The discussion was also influenced by the public sphere and social life, and finally the essentialist woman image of the Hungarian Reform Era – the three-fold role of wife, mother, and housewife – was completed by the ideal of patriot women. Beyond household environments, the education of patriotic women was also practiced in nunneries and private institutions. Private schools had an extended system of relations, thus the novices could take a glimpse into literary and social life.

Newspapers also promoted Hungarian-language reading opportunities for girls and women. The examined periodicals frequently criticized the foreign-language reading habits of women, and raised awareness to Hungarian literary products. In accordance with the ideal of patriotism among women, both periodicals emphasized the highlighted role of females in the creation of national image.

The hypothesis system of the research also touched on the issue of feminine patronage, however, according to the analysis of the selected

periodic press products, the feminine support of culture and literature became a relevant issue both on the grounds of the literacy education of women and amongst the responsibilities of patriotic women. The fashion magazines of the Hungarian Reform Era could already count on female subscribers.

### *Criticism concerning feminine literacy*

Contemporary periodicals created a public forum for the disputes regarding education, language cultivation and the situation of Hungarian literature. Presumably, it can also justify the high rate of discourses concerning reading habits, and the reflections to reading methods. These assumptions usually dealt with intensive reading techniques, and the participants also tried to gain control over extensive reading techniques. Concerning female readers, the analyses confirmed that public discourse shifted its prohibitive narrative towards a permissive – and upon the fulfilment of certain conditions – even supportive direction. In the 1820's, the public discourse about women included quite extreme opinions about the useless nature of women's education and literacy, however, by the 1830's these voices seemingly quenched. Permissive arguments approved the – relatively – free choice of reading materials in parallel with the importunity of women's education. Nevertheless, the majority uniformly raised their voice against the reading of Romantic literature.

Ego-documents also contain notes related to the criticism towards reading. In the correspondence of Borbála Molnár and Krisztina Újfalvy, the corresponding partners uniformly marked out their standpoint – which later also emerged in periodicals – namely that women are only able to correctly choose and interpret their reading materials, if they received the necessary preparations in the course of their upbringing. The texts of the diarist Antónia Kölcsey report that among the circles of rural nobility, public opinion

alternated between the idealisation and the criticism concerning the reading habits of women. Júlia Szendrey blatantly supported reading, and on the top of that – according to other primary and secondary sources – it is apparent that as a good patriot, she also raised her children with the purpose of knowing and loving Hungarian literature and history.

### *Recommended and read genres*

The research confirmed the emergence of an extended diversity of genres, and while previously the women's reading lists included religious texts and books that were closely connected to feminine roles, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the exclusivity of these was disrupted by light literature. There is a kind of ambivalence between public discourse and the practices of seminary institutions for girls. While the former raised the awareness of readers to Hungarian literature, the participants of the women's institutional education more often read German and French writings. The analysis of the diaries according to reading history aspects could not provide reliable evidence concerning the exact identity of the literary products read by the diarists, as (among the investigated documents) only the writings of Etelka Slachta include any reference to these reading experiences. In case of Antónia Kölcsey, the frequent mentioning of fashion magazines and other periodicals suggests that she read the works of recommended contemporary authors, while in case of Júlia Szendrey, upon considering the works of Sándor Petőfi and her respective national song booklets, we can presume that she was literate both in the fields of Hungarian prose and lyrical poetry.

### *Declined popularity of religious writings*

The research concerning the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, as well as previous micro-research and secondary sources suggests that although certain advisory- and cookbooks appeared besides the Bible and a diversity of biblical works, basically the latter dominated the era. At the beginning of the 1700's, 98% of Hungarian publications had religious content. (BENDA, 1976) Book- and library research concerning the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century imply that among the commissioners and supporters of religious publications one could often find women. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the correspondence of Borbála Molnár and Krisztina Újfalvy still contained a vivacious debate concerning the propagation of religious works. The corresponding partners agreed about the highlighted role of religious literature, and Krisztina Újfalvy emphasized the importance of the diversity of genres several times. In case of the investigated periodicals and diaries, the emphasis was on the discourse concerning the reading of light literature and lyrical works. Concerning the Hungarian diarist ladies, the lines of Kölcsey Antónia are the best implications that religious mentality was an element of everyday life. Júlia Szendrey's deathbed confession, published in her diary also gives report about the deep religiousness of the poetess, while the writings of Anne Lister unambiguously reflect theological-religious literacy. However, the detailed description of such reading materials is incomplete in each of the diaries.

Krisztina Frauhammer's investigations concerning prayer books distort the image a little bit. (FRAUHAMMER, 2019; 2017) The researcher confirms the hypothesis that by the 1800's, the genre lost its leading role. This process ensues from the 1760's and 70's, when priority was shifted towards the publications of natural sciences, technology, law and other professions as well as light literature. (BENDA, 1976; FRAUHAMMER, 2017) Krisztina

Frauhammer's research also suggests that in the 1800's, the prayer books of the previous centuries – in newly published forms – were still in continuous use by the reading public. Frauhammer dates the temporal perimeter of the new edition and reinterpretation of prayer books to 1850, based on Béla Holl's research (HOLL, 1958); as well as on her respective investigations. In the second half of the century, the publication of prayer books dedicated to a certain age- or social group became more typical. (FRAUHAMMER, 2019: 23)

### **Further research opportunities**

The objective of the doctoral thesis – beyond the summary of previous outcomes – is to introduce the research possibilities concerning the literacy education of women, including its related problems. Following the investigations and analyses, the exploratory research presented – or can still present – several further questions, thus – as most of the doctoral dissertations – cannot be considered as complete.

Education- and cultural history presents a diversity of research opportunities. The extension of the temporal perimeters of the analysis seems to be an obvious choice, which could provide opportunity to the exploration of more significant changes and processes, and comparative analyses with larger temporal content. An even larger scale opportunity is to compare the literacy education of men and women with contemporary literary education and the formation of male and female reading habits in a historical content. The extension of the investigated social group could also provide further opportunities.

Besides research subjects and temporal perimeters, the methodological toolkit could also be extended. The contemporary fashion magazines and

other literary publications, as well as the ever growing diversity of postcards and pictorials, caricatures and other illustrations from the second half of the century facilitate the iconographical investigation of the subject. Although it would necessitate the inclusion of another discipline – art history – still, an interesting iconographical analysis could be conducted concerning female readers as favoured subjects of paintings.

### *Investigation of the seminary institutions for girls*

Concerning respective research plans, it would be worthwhile to explore the curricula of seminary institutions with a stronger emphasis on education history, and make a comparison with the curricula of boy-schools. Respective research so far mainly focused on the seminary of Lilla Tánzer, but the use of extended primary and secondary sources could paint a more comprehensive image about the activities of seminary institutions in the field of literacy education. Beyond the investigation of the institutions and their curricula, the analysis of explored and still unexplored private documents according to education- and literacy history aspects could also be relevant.

The investigations concerning the Tánzer institute are also still incomplete. The dissertation touches on the system of relations of the school, however, the inclusion of further primary sources could paint a more comprehensive picture about the influence of the institute on the noble society of the Hungarian Reform Era. Concerning women's education history aspects, the ego-documents that give report about the education ideals and influences also contain valuable additions.

### *Inclusion of primary sources*

Among primary sources, diaries and correspondences will continue to have a highlighted role. These not only facilitate the exploration of the literacy education of women, but also the investigation of the sources according to women's education history aspects, as well as the maternal activities of patriot women and the effects of these. Beyond mother-daughter relations, the historical role of the descendants in women's education and culture seems to be an exciting research direction. The letters could also facilitate the exploration of further family relations and influences.

The investigation of contemporary press products in a broader spectrum could also be relevant, concerning the subject of literacy education of women (analysis of book reviews, ecclesiastical/religious papers). In fashion magazines, beyond the analysis of literary segments, it would be important to make a list of announcements concerning light literature, including the investigation of the stereotypical images of women included in the mentioned literary works.



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## Publications Related to the Research Topic

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