

Theses of Phd-dissertation

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As it can be

Engagements of Veres Péter in the mirrors of his political and fictional writings



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## History and objectives

As I have been studying at the University of Miskolc I paid more and more attention for the popular or folk literature. This is due to the vindication and accentuation of popular literature's question at the discourse of history of literature, because it is unimaginable to describe the history of the XXth century without the intellectual properties made by the populars; without the popular movement itself as a forming power to policy, to the public awareness. The popular literature has been broadcasted news from the locked, strict ruled world of the village, that has been well described by the sociography. This locked, inside-turned kind of attitude of peasantry, of the stratum working on the fields based on experience of many centuries. Thinking of serfdom, that has been abolished in 1848 but the large estates remained unchanged in the XXth century and has been conserved the system of serfdom services and vulnerability: we must acknowledge their truth. If we are thinking of the artificially constrained obligations raised by the co-operatives; if we are thinking of misuses during the privatisation after 1989 – we can surely understand the reticence of these peasants' successors. The history for them: was just bottom-view seen, fragmentally detected process, as they were looking up from the everyday-work. Lower-Hungary: maybe this appellation could characterize the peasant world, that could be situated at the origo of the rural or popular literature between the two world-wars.

The popular writers and poets, who had arrived from the world of the village were trying to express the feelings, the experience, the system of habits: which they carried inside. But those like László Németh were also trying, who were far away from the village in their origins, although they felt those problems which arised from the fate of the peasantry. I had written my thesis at the University of Miskolc about an ideological roman of Pál Szabó, about the *New land*. Since that I've been dealed with István Sinka and Péter Veres in lectures and publications. But I've been never met with such as high measured self-educational, outbreaking and enforcement desire, as in the case of Péter Veres. His vocation and his work on validation of the popular thought; and last, but not least the wide range of his political purposed texts drew my attention to him. So my first objective above this thesis is to acquiant an individual way of life: and over this way I can acquiant popularism as an ideology of a group, of a community. Through the validation of the political writings I have tried to shed light on the reason, why did external causes influence this validation. Between the two world

wars primarily the so-called popular-urban debate has influenced the validation of Péter Veres. Those opinions, which were conceived in the Horthy-era continued during the time of the writer's active political engagement and supplemented after the 1956 revolution with the prosecution of the Socialist Labor Party's resolution. After Péter Veres's death the writers of the history of literature must take into consideration recent views of point. Of course, only so views, which could be fitted amongst the frames of the socialisms's policy of literature. Because the „trinity” of support-tolerance-prohibition made by György Aczél did strictly adhere the standard of the censorship. For example: it could support the publishing of any writing about Péter Veres to avoid the disruption of unit at the popular front; it could tolerate any writing that put Péter Veres on a pedestal (because he was dead, not a political rival); but it could prohibit those writings, which have dealt with the nationalism, maybe with the fascism of Péter Veres. Until the Socialist Party enunciated the unit between worker and peasant, Péter Veres was comrade. But as soon as unit replaced by political competition columnies were breaking loose.

Over the political viewed validation, there is a strange problem which were pointed out by Béla Márkus. How can we eliminate man and role? The study by Béla Márkus observes this problem – which in my view fulfills of the whole life work of Péter Veres - through a chosen volume. So this thesis's next objective is to manifest the difference between the real essence of Péter Veres's personality and the undertaken roles. Some artists can unite their lives and their creations; but there are several, who can't. Miklós Zrínyi's epic is a positive precedent as the union, but Berzsenyi 's agricultural mode of life and his poetry are sharply demarcated. In this sense, not just man and role are eliminated, but the prose and political works too, because one uses writing as self-expression, the other serves an ideology. One talks the language of the private person, the other meets the expectations raised by the public life. This way we can designate these two different utterance formal and informal, because the writer's freedom is less valid in the political context. The work of life made by Péter Veres can be interpreted along roles.

#### Research objectives of the dissertation

The thought of the hungarian popularism can be well followed up from the end of that period, which has identified the hungarians, the hungarian nation and the nobility, the nobiliary consciousness; or it has shown the people, the popular milieu as idealized concepts.

The literally popularity, the birth of the popular thought, its engagement at all are expressly the creations of the intellectual history in the XXth century. According to this we must evaluate the popular literature as a totality of texts, which can not be dissevered from some circumstances, from consequences; when some conditions are met, when the changes of society influence the creation and formation of these texts. In case, we take a look at the origin, the orbit and the intentions of the popular writers, poets, this statement seems to be true. Before that there were no chance to represent the peasant interest on the political site. Some prose works of the late XIXth century (József Eötvös, Kálmán Mikszáth) are pointing out the origins of popular movement and the necessity of changes.

At the beginning of the research I found appropriate to define the concept of popularity by separating some surrounding, similar concepts which are often blended with the real meaning of popularity. One of these concepts is folksyness, that turned up in the nobiliary literature of Enlightenment but its penetration was the poetry of Petőfi. We must separate popularity from populism too, because its political and literary version has different objectives and tools. Popularity can be sharply separated from the national literature which is suggested by historical traditions – although some popular poets, like József Erdélyi, Kálmán Sértő had been touching these ideas: the themes of kuruc tradition, turanism, mitologism. And of course popularism must be separated from those concepts like *völkisch*, *volkstümlich*, *Jugendbewegung*, which are marking off a straight way to nationalism, nazism, fascism: as some publicists were thinking.

In the next part of my dissertation I have been draw up my thoughts about Péter Veres, the outstanding figure of the popular movement. About him, because as the most contradictory personality of his age he could be the „idealtypus” of the popular literature. He personifies all those successes and failures; progressive and retrograde views; aesthetics and politics; wisdom and foolishness which were concentrated in popularism. And last but not least Péter Veres is such a personality, whose way of life, his literal work and political activity overarched the XXth century. Seeing his literal activity we can tell him the chronicle of his age, the prose master of peasantry. His political activity directed to show the representation of peasantry; between the two world war less successfully; at the coalition’s age almost successfully; at the age of Soviet pressure only following the doctrine of „as it can be”. The political themed writings from Péter Veres are such documents, that were summarizing not just a man’s, but a whole movement’s theoretical digest. It is clear in these documents that the

popular movement is multicolored, eclectic; however, it hasn't enough political experience and it could turn to wrong ways.

Such a problematic question was the great vital question of the 1930's years: the intention of modernisation. Besides, that in this era both disputing party, populars and urbans has created their own modernisation strategy, Péter Veres represented the fidelity for tradition. The nation standed at the top of his values, the family, the community of the village, and his own section of people, the peasantry within. To think in people and nation: that was one of his trends. The popularity of Péter Veres is not just socialism or nationalism, not just left or right side, but eternal human values, the protection of these values against external and inner destructing powers. The role of the politician is just one: the mentality and the view of the peasant is another. In his belle-lettres texts the hidden virtues of the peasantry were revealed and he fixes the picture of a world that were already persisting in his time of life. The political activity of Péter Veres mostly influenced by the socialism but his literal activity showed and kepted the values of peasantry. Thus could he become an idealtype.

The phenomenon of the dual gauge beside these two roles is also conspicuous about the validation of the popular movement in the past and present days. One of the chapters of this validation is the popular-urban debate, in which Veres Péter must have been inevitably involved. And not just he – almost all members of the popular movement involved. They must have protecting themselves against the prosecutions, which have identifying the national sentiment as anti-Semitism, fascism. But popular sentiment is just one side of the coin. The other side is the urban standpoint: its insight about the lack of opportunity, the irrationality of the mystic nationalism and the wildings of the popularity; even it has been fallen overboard, it has been drawn up far-out opinions. During the validation of this debate I've reached to the same conclusion, that the contemporary did: the popular-urban debate in many cases had lacked the correct basis, and both side could do better to come to an agreement about the fight against fascism. Maybe this way that involuntary path could have been modified that led the Horthy-government to the german alliance.

Methods of research, exploration and utilization of sources

During the systematization of Péter Veres's political writings I used chronology as principle. I have been examined the texts in chronological order: from the first, printed article

(1928) 'til the last political program-writing (1948). The thinking of Péter Veres is not called eclectic at a venture: Péter Veres had been examining in these two decades a wide range of political theories from democratic views to being little short of Nazi ideology. I'd rather think that *examination* is the best phrase to that way, on which the relation between Péter Veres and these political conceptions can be described. I couldn't do without looking out the theory of policy and representing contemporary political streams, because the studies of Péter Veres could be objectively examined only in their surroundings. I've tried to read the first editions, because these are the most close readings. N. B. the censorship had cut out definite parts from the volumes of *Account* and *What the man worths, if hungarian*, with reference to causes of content. Of course chronology does not reflect the order of importance. Each chapter is based on a work, on a volume, because these volumes summarize each political theory. Beyond these volumes I used articles, monographies on popularity, volumes of studies, letters, diary notes and political documents indeed. So this part of the dissertation leaves out prose texts of consideration, it cares exclusively about referencial texts, which are fulfilled with references of verity. The footnoting follows these texts. The dissertation mentions the reception of the political theories published in volumes, articles as sticking points.

I have devoted a distinct chapter for the prose works, because the two roles can be sharply separated. I have deliberately wedged this chapter amongst the studies published during the second world war and the political writings analyzing the coalitions'era, because 1945 can be seen as a verge of periods. Not just in its historical meaning, but it made verge in the life of each individual. As the „peasant leader” penetrated more and more deeply into the dense forest of politics, he knew increasingly how uphill task he had and how hard it is to stand the politics ground. As Péter Veres the politician stands facing the future, so the writer turns back to the past. Because the writer can not do better than fixing the passing mode of life, the culture, the regular habits of peasantry. This turning back to past has a characteristic feature, which makes the depicted past more beautiful than it was. Although the life of peasantry was hard, too hard for a human being. Veres describes the changes of the peasant life, its process is similar to that long, through generations lasting process which has been described by Gyula Illyés's work, *The people of plains*. This change clearly meant narrowing opportunities, growing limits to the peasantry until the beginning of the XXth century, when an explicit outbreaking will has overmastered the most poor. And brought to life the popular movement, which has been prepared to the representation of the most poor strata.

The prose works of Péter Veres show us the values, the moral-ethic aspects of peasant world but less emphasise the fact, that even these values may become interfering facts of outbreak, of enforcement. And at the existing socialism the writer doesn't want to remark what politician does. The state of peasantry is not an important question anymore for the ideologists of the socialist society, but the workpeople is; there is no such an important sample like of the Soviet, more important, than the hungarian nature, temper, character. Agrarian reform is not a current problem anymore, the only-childism, the concept of the „rotter” are commonplaces. Veres knows these facts from experience at the Rákosi-era and then at the Kádár-era, where the role of the politician is just titular, the role of the writer based on respect which is the main point of the Péter Veres-phenomenon.

#### Summary and the ways of utilization of the dissertation

We can identify the first two decades of the XXth century as the time of the hungarian agrarian movement's strengthening, when peasantry gets political representation of interests. So the first political themed writing of Péter Veres have got certain preliminaries. The 16 years old Veres got the first intellectual experiences at the agricultural society in Balmazújváros, from newspapers. In his autobiographical writing, in the pages of *Account* we can explore eclecticism as intellectual horizon: Veres has been reading many kind of newspapers. At his birthsite, at Balmazújváros founded in 1908 the National Agricultural Party which united those people, who were dissatisfied with the program of the Hungarian Independent Agricultural Party led by András L. Áchim. In this party had Veres Péter met with as carismatic peasant-leaders as he would like to be. It is clear, that the events of 1919 did not leave his developement untouchable, because the peasant collective of Balmazújváros has been grounded its own directory in which Péter Veres had part. In this period we already find the foundations of the volume that Péter Veres published two decades later, titled *Socialism, nationalism*: socialism could be the only redeeming solution what solves the problem, how to achieve the rights of the peasants; or to reach socialism at first nationalism is needed, so people have to have patriotic sympathies. The young revolutionary has already prepared his own philosophy for himself in addition using Nietzsche's words: *The utmost, man could reach is heroic life*. Namely, to realize ourselves in the unit of faith and action: to dare and to progress. These are quite romantic aims but the man, who came from the very

bottom of society to conquer the country needs an engine, an inner power supply: he needs confidence.

And then two decades pass away while this sentence gets to the end of the volume *What the man worths, if hungarian*. The year of 1932 brought the change at the writer's career of Péter Veres what finally directed him onto the way of thinking about people and nation. He did not find work in Balmazújváros because of the economic crisis, so he went to Budapest. He had not enough time for intellectual activity in addition the daily work but he took share in a meeting of the socialdemocratic party, where navvies presented. During talking about the hard life of agricultural workers one of his companions did digresse his great injury, that those people, who have humiliating, dragging them to the mud are often peasants by birth. At this moment burst Péter Veres into tears. Of course, its reason was a feverish sickness, the hopeless future, the care of five children and the hopelessness of the connection to the leftist literary circles and political movements. But this experience became determining although; or because it was a mystic experience. Veres Péter had an idea by it, that racial feeling is not empty demagogy, the hungarian race and the hungarian peasant means separate reality not just in the world but in the hungarian nation too. The racial thought origins from this idea not from hitlerist movements. *The peasantry of the Lowland*: this volume became the direct result of the racial feeling, and from the publishing of the book Veres Péter was put down as the representative of racial mystery. Then in 1934 Veres Péter had connected to the „new progression” as the popular movement was called by contemporaries. László Németh was involved in the connection, he gave inspiration to the writing of this volume.

The next volume, *Socialism, nationalism* continued thinking about racialism. Why did Veres Péter choose this question? We must search for the reason in the Zeitgeist. The reason is clearly the discussion about the Nazi ideology at this decade. The definition and content of objectives like race, blood tribe, face of nation, biological idealtpe must have been discussed; and not just populars shared part in the discuss but the answers of Ferenc Fejtő and Ignotus clearly proved, that the citizen ideology considered important to answer the questions arisen. Zeitgeist is the reason of the journal debates, which unfortunately did not find result but distracted the attention from the Foreign affairs and the Home affairs of the government. The cognitive movement of the March Front and the sociography spoke out in vain against the large estates wich have been keeping feudal traditions; showed the inhuman poverty and exploitation of the agricultural people in vain; warned the necessity of unity in vain; it was too late.



The volume, citing a verse from Ady *What the man worths, if hungarian* generated during the war; it is the most clear drafting of the popular thought and it is an enchiridion dedicated to the youngest generation of the next popular leaders. The philosophy put in the form of letters remind the philosophical letters of Seneca; Péter Veres was well-read man, so the ancient thinker can not be ruled out from the circle of the models of the popular writer. A part of the letters may justify this assumption, because these contain moral instructions as Seneca's: philosophy teaches to do, not to talk. The volume continues popular ideology that says the hungarian province and its flatness the main constituent element. Hungary had agricultural economy, so it seems, that Veres was right; but he did not stop at his statement, he talked against the middle class imprudently. He considered three strata of the society as progressive elements: peasantry, workpeople and the part of the intellectuals that have been performing creative work. This statement and the intention to educate the young peasants to leaders produced debates in a biting tone. Gyula Illyés, the eminent of the popular's center has remarked, that undertaking the power given by the people, supervised by the society is not equal seizing power, and Illyés was advising Veres not to do this way. This volume shows the *Zeitgeist* in terms of taking steps to national characteristic. With Gyula Illyés, Ödön Málnási, Gyula Kornis, Zsolt Beöthy, Ottó Herman and Géza Féja Péter Veres had been at pains too to define what Hungarian people is. This part of the dissertation tries to unstitch the reasons that led Péter Veres to extremist opinions about the middle class, about the art. Last but not least the chapter shows, how did the censored, mutilated version of this volume could became an illustration of the warlike-nationalist pursuits.

The next chapter analyses the content of the volume *Peasant fate, hungarian fate*. Although this writing is smaller by the extent, yet means turning point in the thinking of its author. We can perceive the falling of the peasant-cult in it, because Péter Veres must realize that the persons involved in the affair of policy are using the peasant votes to creating theories; not to better the life of peasantry. The author takes these theories one by one; what kind of solutions offer to solve the urgent problems, like the land issue. That was the main problem of the popular movement: to grow the peasant smallholding, which was struggling in the squeeze of large estates. The difference between the small business and the large-scale property makes the next problem: is it better for the peasant to own his land or to work in a co-operative? Péter Veres thinks that the owner of a 20 acres land lives better than a day-wage man. So the private ownership is important but in the shadow of the Soviet it seemed illusion.

Péter Veres regarded prose as the maker of community and emphasized many times that peasantry have no communal consciousness, no ideology, no significant literacy and they have no will to have these values. The political writings are clearly communal activities, their writer wants to differ, to outbreak. To rise from the peasant fate, from the determining life. Among his basic intentions he marks the role of the peasant leader and the writer: between these roles there is a connecting element, the role of the intellectual. The intellectual is fermenting material, mortar between the strata of society. But to be intellectual the populars must have been withdrew from that mode of life what they considered as a model. They had to leave the peasant usage, because the civil public demanded clear style. Veres had nothing to do but to keep the passed peasant world's traces. He concentrates to the past in his prose works not the future, what the political works tried to sketch.

After the end of war, after the liberation-occupation Péter Veres's way turned to the direction of politics. In the era of coalition there was a narrow chance to choose, but he made an effort to tack between the communists and the smallholders to realize the policy of the National Peasant Party. It's not his fault, that he couldn't do much as president: human power couldn't stop the Soviet „road-roller” that has annihilated all intention and party, out of the communists' view. For Péter Veres only one chance left: to accept the role offered by Mátyás Rákosi, to stay a member of the government. In this era he had written the last work what went through the popular-national thought and the problem of the estate. The publishing of the *Peasant future* has great value of actuality: the Peasant Party represented the principle of private ownership, Veres and Ferenc Erdei had expound their opinion about the co-operation. They asked for the principle of gradualism in the extending of co-operatives' membership but after the speech of Rákosi at 20th August 1948 it manifested, that the communist party is aggressively collectivising the peasant properties. At the 22th April 1948 the Communist Party's Political Committee has created the principles of co-operation, in which has expounded that there are no appropriate circumstances for the co-operatives. But the resolution condemning the communist party of Yugoslavia and Tito, the „chained up dog” stipulated, that the private properties producing capitalism there from hour to hour. So we may understand that turn between the spring and summer of 1948 better: at spring the communist party had taking up its position against the co-operation and the Peasant Party, but at summer it has demanding the acceleration of co-operation. In this changeable political climate the *Peasant future* wanted to overtake the peasant-policy of the communists, it wanted to expound its programme for peasants trying to stop, to influence the communists. The study

couldn't produce an effect: but it is quite symbolic that all studies of Péter Veres made controversy, their themes were important for many people. Nonetheless he must have been resigning to be a poor peasant whom leader is the worker, namely Rákosi.

I consider it important, that over the analysis and valueing of these volumes, studies, over the portrait of the politician, writer and thinker the dissertation characterizes human qualities too. Because we can not leave out the human factor from the thinking of Péter Veres with all the faults and virtues. Péter Veres was unable to hide his opinion under a bushel. He was loyal to the old peasant ethic: it is possible to perish but it is impossible to be a rotter. With straightness; sometimes too undisguised did he expose his views about the jews, the „trouserred people”, about the social role of the women, about the modern thinking, about the hungarian art and theatricals. His reason was the peasant moral what demanded sincerity. And the roles, wich he has been undertaking. To tell the truth as a prose-writer, to represent the peasantry. To revolt, to resist, to deny all those values, which has been opposite or seem to be opposite to peasant values. That's how complete each other the writer and the thinker; the man and the role.