

Munkácsy Tudományos Diákköri Konferencia – 2016

Yours ever,

Berecz Lilla

ABSTRACT

Egyetlen dolog állandó a világon: a változás. Az emberiség fejlődése szépen végigkövethető a társadalom alakulásán keresztül. Az emberi társadalom felépítése, jellemző vonásai valamint a társadalmi normák évről évre újulnak. Mi, az „építőelemek” pedig véleményt alkotunk a rendszerről, amelyben élünk. Kritizáljuk a társadalmat. Régen is voltak és ma is vannak, akik véleményüket közkinccsé teszik a fejlődést előremozdítandó. Ők az érdeklődő értelemmel, elkötelezettséggel és jó kifejezőkészséggel megáldott írók, költők. A társadalomkritika az irodalom fontos eleme. Szórakoztató, elgondolkodtató és megdöbbentő egyszerre. Természetes azonban, hogy sokakban felmerül a kérdés: a „gyönyörködtetés” mellett van-e tényleges, gyakorlati hatása a társadalomkritikának, mint irodalmi eszköznek? Eléri-e céljukat a társadalomkritikus írók? Mi egyáltalán a céljuk?

Bevezetés

Az angol társadalommal kapcsolatban mindenkinek mások az elképzelései, viszont vannak világszerte elterjedt sztereotípiák, melyektől nehéz elvonatkoztatni (csakúgy mint a teázás, az udvarias gentleman-ek, modern társadalmi morálok, fejlett gondolkodás...). A történelem során végbement angol társadalmi változások éppolyan nagy hatást gyakoroltak a többi nemzet fejlődésére, mint a gazdasági vagy politikai téren történtek.

Jane Austen a 18. századi Angliában élt és alkotott. Írásai a világszintű regényirodalom kiemelkedő remekművei, melyeket a mai napig forgat és szeret az olvasóközönség. Romantikus alkotásainak középpontjában a szerelem, a házasság, a család és a társasági élet áll.

Virginia Woolf, angol író a 19. század végi Londonban született. Szélsőséges stílusa miatt művei szűkebb körben kedveltek, mégis a 20. századi modern irodalom vezéralakjaként emlegetik. Megteremtett egy új regénytípust, a tudatfolyamregényt. Művei tükrözik feminista létét és az elméjében zajló folyamatok elvontságát.

Mi a közös a két, látszólag teljesen különböző nőben? Bár egy évszázadnyi különbséggel, de mindkettőjük az angol társadalom tagja, fejlődéseinek szemtanúja volt. Hogyan éli meg két belső szemlélő az értékrendek felborulását, az előrelépésért való harcot, és ez miként jelenik meg alkotásaikban? Hogyan értékelik saját koruk normáit, min és hogyan változtatnának szívesen?

Tudományos Diákköri Kutatómunkámban Jane Austen és Virginia Woolf kritikusi szemén keresztül vizsgálom meg a 18. és 19. századi angol társadalmat. Az ő példájukon keresztül vizsgálom meg és szemléltetem a társadalomkritika, mint általánosságban vett irodalmi jelenség jellemzőit, célját, hatását.

Kutatásomban nagy segítségemre voltak a Jane Austenről és Virginia Woolfról készült különböző életrajzok valamint a munkásságukkal foglalkozó írások. Gondolkodásmódjukról, koruk jellemzőiről az általuk írt regényekből és levelekből tájékozódtam. Ezenfelül a két író életéből és regényeiből készült filmek hosszú listája is rendelkezésemre állt a felkészüléshez. Mindemellett volt szerencsém egy hónapot tölteni a csodálatos angliai Bath városában, mely Jane Austen életének meghatározóbb helyszíne volt. Itt megtapasztalhattam azt a hangulatot, életstílust, melyet az író (bár több évszázaddal korábban) is átélt és regényeiben megjelenített. Otlétem során ellátogattam a Jane Austen Múzeumba is.

Módszerek

Az általam választott témát szerettem volna valamilyen rendhagyó módon feldolgozni. Az angol társadalom(kritika) fejlődését két kiemelkedő irodalmi személy, Jane Austen és Virginia Woolf munkásságán keresztül vizsgáltam meg. Mivel mindkét író nő nevéhez szorosan kötődik a levél fogalma, így választásom egy kreatív szövegalkotási módszerre, a levélírássra esett. Kutatásom eredményét Jane Austen és Virginia Woolf fikcionális levelezésébe ültetve fogalmaztam meg. A két különböző századbeli Angliában élő nő tollával írtam a leveleket, melyekben a korukbeli angol társadalomnak állítanak tükröt kíméletlenül.

Igyekeztem minél autentikusabb lenni, ennek érdekében a levelezést angol nyelven írtam, és a levélformához hűen formáztam. Törekedtem a valóságúságra, így a történelmi háttér, a két nő életrajza és műveik mellett az általuk írt levelek, naplóbejegyzések tanulmányozására is fordítottam időt. Ezek az eredeti levelezések nagy segítségemre voltak mindkettejük stíluának, gondolatmenetének és szófordulatainak megfigyelésében. Az általam írt levelekben igyekeztem mindehhez hű maradni.

A levélírással, mindamelllett, hogy széleskörű háttértudást igényel, feldobja, személyesebb hangvétellé teszi a kutatómunkát.

Dear Mrs Woolf,

I have the pleasure of writing to you with the sincere intention of inviting you to the Austen mansion, Steventon, where a grand ball of writers is to be held in two months time from to-day.

Having heard of your exceptional authorship, I am not without hopes of us having a long conversation on writing and exchanging some of our ideas.

Please forgive my inquisitiveness; nevertheless I cannot wait to be acquainted to you!

Best regards,

Miss J. Austen



Dear Jane Austen,

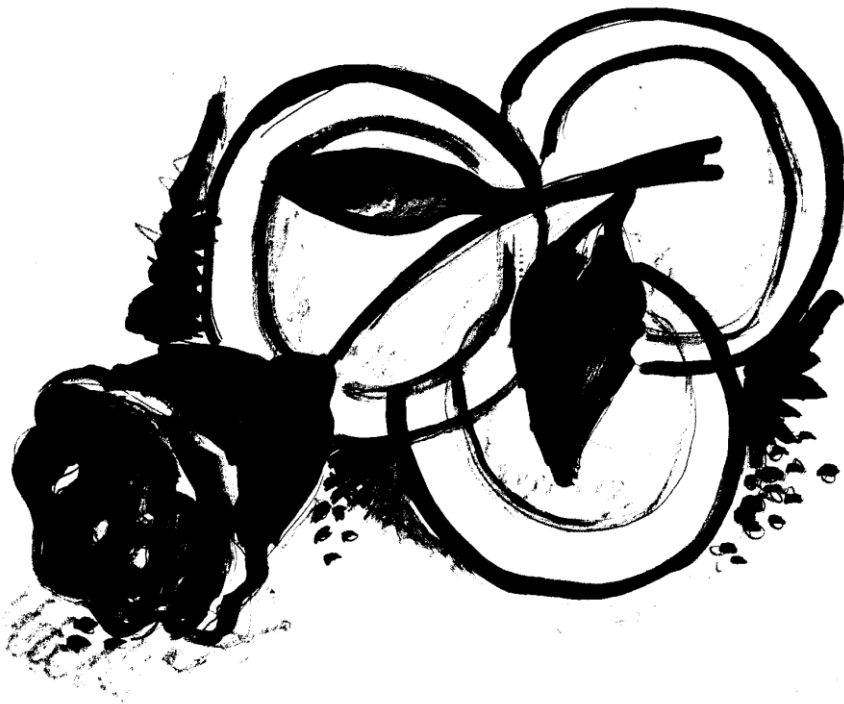
Your letter caused me not a little surprise and joy. And so the invitation to the ball! The pleasure is mine to accept it. I am eager to meet the Queen of English Novels!

Though I am a bit perplexed... I must confess that I have never been in a ball in my entire life. I would be more than grateful if you could describe me a fancy event like this one, and the most important social expectations I should meet there.

Please answer in your fastest so that I can start preparing in time.

Yours,

Virginia Woolf



Dear Mrs Virginia Woolf,

A 'fancy event' –as you referred to our balls– is far more disenchanting than all of us likes to think about it.

*A ball is a fair of hypocrisy, I dare say. People –especially young ladies– attend these social events with the apparent purpose of parading and flaunting. Their eyes are wandering like hungry predators, hunting for a ruffled ribbon, a freed lock of hair or an impolite little gesture to have it fallen prey to their gossip. These predator eyes are versed in all fields of life that a worthwhile English dame must be versed in: the newest fashion, dance, signs of secret love, proper behaviour and so on. And I shall enforce that I am as convinced as anyone else would be –if they have taken the effort to observe their behaviour– that the owners of the mentioned critical eyes are the unsuspecting preys at the same time. What else would you call it, my Dear, if not hypocrisy: pretending perfection and criticising 'the weaker' while dreading of the possibility that we are 'the weaker'. I try to visualize the atmosphere of English balls in most of my writings, including the one I am working on these days: *Northanger Abbey*. In this novel my tone is quite ironic about insincerity and falsehood in public.*

Although on the other hand a ball is always a colourful flower on the pale field of our everyday-life. Sometimes I feel that there is not a rewarding occupation for a young lady in the country. It is so quiet and calm here that people tend to create 'interesting' activities for themselves, otherwise they would die of boredom. To mention some of these activities: telling gossips, daydreaming about the Prince Charming, finding an enticing groom for any girl around who doesn't have one yet.

Please accept my apology for my ironic voice! I dare hope that your ideas are not remarkably far from mine and that I found understanding ears and agreeing heart in you!

Satisfying your request, a neat dress of the newest fashion and your husband as a company is all my piece of advice for you. In case your Mr Woolf should be engaged somewhere else, your being married must be hidden somehow for the duration of the ball. A young Mrs without her husband in a ball is the best gossip I could ever imagine...

I am yours sincerely,

Jane Austen

Dear Jane,

Your ideas are so close to my way of thinking that I already feel being friends with you! Hoping my friendly style doesn't offend you!

It's unnecessary to apology for your 'ironic voice'. I highly appreciate the courage of expressing your true opinion!

Thank you very much for your advice, I'll try to keep it. I don't think Leonard will be able to quit his work for the time of the ball...

I'm happy to hear that considering the English society ill is not only my craze. Though it has changed incredibly lot in the past decades... The people are not bored, what's more, they're hurrying all the time! The streets are full of worried people walking sure-footed, loud vendors in busy boutiques, crowded omnibuses with harsh tootle... just the normal pulsating London... I won't say that I cannot bear it. This liveliness, this bustle keeps me alive in my worse days.

My only misfortune is that I can see behind the delightful scene... People always have something to do that draws their attention from the others. Social and personal relationships are neglected. Moral values are faded. We are living in such a swamp! You talked about hypocrisy. One could even touch it, it's so massively present here! You can never know what is charmed away by the neat smiles on the faces. If only I could see in their minds and read their thoughts! How amazing it would be!

The gap between the top and bottom layers of society is constantly widening. And people are callous. The opulent officials, businessmen, actresses and dames walk by hundreds of miserable beggars a day in the most indifferent way possible. Where have sympathy, empathy and solidarity gone?? They're only empty words left behind...

Another vice of our society is the crisis of the traditional English family. According to my experience, the members of families often feel forced to feature an old-fashioned (father-, mother-, spouse-, child-) role. Just because it is expected by the society. My childhood memories contribute to my negative judgment on family-life. I don't see the point of establishing a family anymore.

I'm working on a novel through which I long to draw people's attention to the ridiculousness of today-families. I also want to open their eyes to see how the circumstances developed and how our thinking should change together with English society. Is it a far too fantastic dream? The story revolves around a typical English family's life through 3 generations, embracing almost 60 years.

I'd really like to get familiar with your thoughts on these topics!

Yours,

Virginia

PS.: I'm not sure what the title of my mentioned novel should be. Do you have any ideas?



Dear Virginia,

It is my pleasure to be able to consider such a learned and sophisticated thinker and author as you my friend.

The idea of your newest novel gave my imagination wings. I have been thinking about what the most adequate title would be for days and nights. Here is the result: 1. Generations 2. Changing Years 3. Years and Generations 4. Years 5. Yield to Years. I hope that my efforts were useful and helped you some way.

The picture that you 'painted' about your London astonished me and made me alter my former opinion on the countryside. I do not think I could ever live in such a chaos! I like to visit towns indeed, but lived my whole life in the country, all of my childhood memories attach me here. Upon recollection my family is responsible for my exceedingly agreeable childhood spent in the boring countryside.

I have to admit that your conception about families overwhelmed me. Let me express my warmest compassion on your negative family experience. On the contrary, family plays a mightily important role in my life. Far from the pulsating city-life –using your words– family is the source of knowledge, amusement and one's future expectancies as well. Your relatives support you in your life from cradle to grave.

On the other hand this tight relation may be the cause of a young man's or lady's bleak prospects. Everybody is judged not only by their personality but also by their background –considering family and fortune. In accordance, a poor, indelicate family might reflect on a person's honour.

*The only thing I cannot bear concerning relatives is getting married within the family which –to my greatest detest– is a common habit these times. This remarkable opposition –that I visualised in *Pride and Prejudice* among others– derives from my faith in marrying only for love.*

I am totally convinced that no-one should ever be forced into a marriage on the basis of financial or any other matters. Therefore I also condemn the idea of predestination of young people's life by arranging their proposal when they're only little children. As to my persuasion, choosing a life-long partner must be the privilege of the concerned person and not his/her parents', grandparents' or neighbours'. I shall always persist on my opinion that no marriage should be made on the basis of anything else than love and no relationship based on love should be obstacle by financial matters.

I am eager to read your ideas concerning marriage and love.

Yours affectionately,

Jane

Dear Jane,

Thank you very much for your ideas, you did help me a lot! I decided to title my book: *The Years*.

Sorry for the shortness of this letter. I must work hard nowadays until my novel is ready to get printed. Fortunately I have the advantage of an own press (Hogarth Press) in our house but it still takes a lot of time. Plus I have the Bloomsbury Group to support me in realising my aims. The Bloomsbury Group keeps me alive in this intellectually dumb world... They are wonderful people with wonderful ideas!

I promise to write more when finished with the publication!

Yours,

Virginia



Dearest Virginia,

Violating principles of politeness I decide to write before –by sending your promised longer letter– you testified your accessibility. The only excuse for my impropriety is the need of your advice urgently!

My most current news to you is that I am engaged! It sounds incredibly as this what I have always been waiting for. Harris Bigg-Wither is an old friend of the Austens. He is an agreeable gentleman with a decent fortune. Yesterday my sister, Cassandra and me visited the Bigg family in Manydown and in the end of the evening Harris got down on his knees and proposed marriage to me. Following common-sense, I accepted the proposal.

The only problem in this seemingly happy story is that I do not love him! The idea that I have acted against my own notion kept haunting me so I made up my mind: I will retract the proposal.

Do you –as the whole society except for my family– think that I am about to take a disastrous step?

I highly appreciate your opinion, please answer as fast as possible!

Most affectionately yours,

Jane



My Dear Jane,

Don't worry, by no means would I ever consider you inappropriate! I have managed to finish my book so now I'm fulfilling my promise.

First of all: you're engaged! I totally agree with you...that you did something stupid. You made a hasty decision based on what others would've thought to be proper. I wonder what could've gone through your mind...However, in a short time you were able to admit your fault and that is honourable. I can only encourage you in following your heart. Don't listen to the public's expectations! Listen to your feelings! Go and withdraw the proposal if it calms down your conscience. Don't listen to me! Only listen to yourself!

What do I think about marriage and love? The question of marriage is handled in a much more liberal way nowadays. Today marrying for love is the standard and within the family is out of question. Finances play appreciably smaller role in finding a spouse. But interestingly enough these modern love-based marriages go wrong and finally end up in divorce in quite a high proportion. If you ask me, I would originate these failures in my already mentioned theory of rigid family roles. Let's take women as the most seriously struggling victims of the system: they have to fit in far too many different roles. Women are supposed to be pretty, kind, weak and romantic as lovers. Devoted, family- and child-centred and patient as mothers. Clean, diligent, good cook and always busy as housewives. Whereas men supposed to be...? Masculine, handsome, strong...always. So where is equality??

We both agree on that the main principle of life is following your heart, don't we? So what if it beats for someone from your own sex? Is it outrageous? Is it a sin? Why is it considered a crime? Why isn't it everyone's right to love whoever they want?? (I tried to visualize the idea of homosexuality and liberty of sexual orientation in *Orlando*.)

So many unanswered questions on my mind...

Anyway, good luck with your 'dis-proposal'!

Yours,

V.W.

My Dearest Virginia,

I am very thankful for your encouraging words, they contributed to my determination a lot. I was looking forward to telling you the greatest news of mine: I am free again! It had never come to my mind before that staying a spinster can be more delightful than being engaged. I dare say it is, in my case!

Spinsterhood is the most miserable faith for a young lady to be imagined. I used to share the common opinion but due to the current events I have changed my mind. To be a wife and mother is the predestination of every girl according to the society. My primer aim is still finding love and establishing a family, nevertheless, spinsterhood mustn't be as terrible as it is considered. All in all, I am ready to face whatever God has to me!

In connection with the right to love, I think liberty should be reached. Although I would never have gone so far to consider affiliation to the same sex. Please do not misunderstand me, I am still interested in your ideas!

Yours ever,

Jane



My Dear Jane,

Congratulations on your spinsterhood! Don't get offended, I'm not being ironic now. I truly appreciate your independent decision! Your definiteness is lacking from most of the women nowadays...

As you could probably find out according to my thoughts, I am a feminist. Oh, or maybe you don't even know what it means?! Feminists are those, who believe that human beings were created equal regardless their gender. We are certain that women are intellectually and socially (at least) equal to men. Besides we strongly believe that all people are entitled to freedom and liberty regardless their gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, ethnicity, religion, culture, lifestyle etc.

Women are too precious to spend all their life in the kitchen! Why would it be impossible for them to work? To show their abilities and take advantage of them?

We are fighting for the rights of women! We are fighting for equality!

Please don't be shocked at my vehemence. I massively believe in these principles, and my emotions overflowed me...I'm sorry!

Yours,

VW



My Dearest Virginia,

My inference according to our letter-conference is that every society has its own problems in any time. In case one of the problems seem to be sold, another happens to occur. This is how society develops.

We, thinkers and writers are blessed with the privilege of recognising the faults, mistakes of our age and the talent of putting it down in a way that other people can understand them as well.

I am amazed by your sincere, clean way of writing! I long to express my true opinion through my novels but only in a covert way. If I ever attempted to put down my critical views directly (as you dare to do it), that would end up in a scandal and no-one would read my books. For this reason I must hide the pure truth behind enjoyable, pleasant stories to attract readership and entertain people (involving myself as well). Those who are worthy, will understand the discreet inklings as well, I hope.

I am looking forward to talking to you face to face!

Your affectionate friend,

Jane



Dear Jane,

The revelation of the truth about society drives me crazy! You're absolutely right. But it's so hard to accept that however clever, talented and hardworking you are, you can't save the world...

Our task is to spread our recognitions in the way our age allows and society accepts them, be in a direct or a hidden mode.

See you,

Virginia

The flower bloomed and faded.
The sun rose and sank.
The lover loved and went
And what the poets said
in rhyme, the young
translated into
practice.



Összegzés

A társadalom örök fejlődésben van. Minden kornak megvannak a maga pozitívumai és negatívumai is. Az emberiség a saját hibájából tanul, ezáltal mozdítva előrébb a társadalmat. Egy probléma megoldása újfajta problémák megjelenését vonja maga után. Jól imitálja ezt a következő példa: évtizedeken át folyt a küzdelem a nők egyenjogúságáért, mire elérték, hogy ők is dolgozhassanak. Ezzel teljesen felborult a hagyományos családmodell, és új kérdések vetődtek fel a gyerekneveléssel, a háztartással és a családban betöltött szerepekkel kapcsolatban, amik szintén megoldásra várnak.

A társadalomkritika a józan gondolkodás és véleményformálás bizonyítéka. Az író közönség elé viszi a társadalommal kapcsolatos elképzeléseit, bízva az olvasók befogadóképességében. Mi értelme kritizálni? Ki kíváncsi a véleményükre?- tehetné fel bárki a sokakban megfogalmazódó kérdést. A kritikából rengeteget lehet tanulni, ha építő jellegű. Íróik pedig az esetek többségében nem csupán az általuk képviselt, hanem egy többek által osztott véleménynek adnak hangot. Ők töltik be a hangosbemondó szerepét.

Egy figyelemfelkeltő, megragadó stílusú, meggyőző írás csodákra képes: lelkesíteni, mozgósítani tud, ha befogadó közönségre talál.

A világot megváltani egy ember (még egy író) sem tudja, viszont a haladás tempójának és irányának meghatározói mi vagyunk. Mindannyian, Jane Austen is, Virginia Woolf is, Ön is, én is.

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