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## Cultural Studies and the Subaltern: Theory and Practice<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

My article discusses the theoretical and practical implications of applying the methodology of cultural studies, as it is delineated by Stuart Hall, in the East-Central European context. Despite the celebrated “internationalization” of the discipline as well as “de-Eurocentrizing” initiatives, a number of scholars, such as G. C. Spivak and Hall himself, claim that research taking a cultural studies approach has offered little innovative intervention in recent years, and the discipline remains defined by a Western, (post)modern theoretical framework. I argue that scholars in Hungary (and Slovenia) have an unprecedented opportunity to contribute to the field, yet in order to avoid falling into the trap of repeating obvious claims and conclusion, we need to take an approach that Spivak associates with the toleration of uncertainty and paradox, and Jessica Benjamin calls intersubjective interaction.

**Key words:** cultural studies, East-Central Europe, subaltern, intersubjectivity

## Kulturne študije in *subalternost*: teorija in praksa

### Povzetek

Članek obravnava teoretične in praktične implikacije uporabe metodologije kulturnih študij po zasnovi Stuarta Halla v vzhodnoevropskem in srednjeevropskem kontekstu. Kljub znameniti internacionalizaciji discipline ter pobud za evropsko decentralizacijo številni učenjaki, kot na primer G.C. Spivak in Hall, ugotavljajo, da so raziskave s pomočjo kulturnih študij v zadnjih letih naredile skromen inovativni korak naprej in da disciplino še naprej določa zahodni (post) moderni teoretični okvir. Avtorica prispevka dokazuje, da imajo učenjaki na Madžarskem (in v Sloveniji) prvič priložnost, da prispevajo k razvoju tega prostora, vendar pa se morajo pri tem izogibati pasti, ki bi pomenila ponavljanje očitnih ugotovitev in sklepov. To je mogoče tako, da se zavzame pristop, ki ga G.C. Spivak povezuje z dopuščanjem negotovosti in paradoksa, Jessica Benjamin pa ga imenuje intersubjektna interakcija.

**Ključne besede:** kulturne študije, Vzhodna in Srednja Evropa, *subalternost*, intersubjektnost

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# Cultural Studies and the Subaltern: Theory and Practice

## 1. Introduction

Cultural Studies is one of those relatively new disciplines which critics either advocate with an unprecedented enthusiasm or consider outdated and shallow. Though there are more and more studies being published that take a cultural studies approach, and several scholars are talking about the “internationalization” of the field as well as “de-Eurocentrizing” initiatives,<sup>2</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, for instance, argues that cultural studies remains trapped in a stereotypical and narcissistic framework:

Playing in such a ‘structured ideological field,’ in the academic workplace in the United States, the ‘Cultural Studies’ style of work in literature is today encouraged to remain narcissistic, question-begging, ridden with plot summary and stereotypes, citing sensational detail without method, a quick-fix institutionalization of heroic beginnings in Birmingham. (Spivak 2012, 352)

Spivak’s ironical language is suggestive of the problems the field faces: driven by a profound political aim, a great number of studies taking the cultural studies approach simply use cultural phenomena to prove a point. Stuart Hall, who is often considered the “founding father” of the Birmingham school (though he would probably not put himself into such a category) often gives voice to his concern about the theoretical fluency of cultural studies, especially in the United States. Instead of “fighting off” theory, and “wrestling with angels,” which are his preferred methods (Morley 1996, 265), we can observe the rapid institutionalization of the discipline, which leads to simplified statements and precludes theoretical innovation.

Another difficulty that haunts cultural studies is the question of the subaltern. Can the subjects of cultural studies speak, and, even more importantly, can they talk back to the critic carrying out the investigation? Even Spivak, whose celebrated term I use in this article, which, to put it simply, refers to the silenced voices of marginalised groups, seems to take a dubious position concerning her subject of analysis.<sup>3</sup> She claims “I find myself insisting on restoring rhetorical reading practices because I believe, in an irrational, utopian, and impractical way, that such reading can be an ethical motor that undermines the ideological field” (Spivak 2012, 352). In other words, Spivak chooses to analyse the tropes of literary texts, arguing that they reveal a hidden, unconscious dimension repressed by hegemonic discourses. An ideal method for the skilful literary critic, no doubt (which I also used in my book on Salman Rushdie’s fiction), yet it invites the question: to what extent is the critic analysing a repressed, hidden phenomenon, and to what extent is s/he constructing a speculative theory? When Spivak reads *Jane Eyre*, for instance, and claims that Bertha Mason’s death is “a borrowing from the Hindu practice of *sati*” (Childs 1997, 168), despite her remarkably skilful analysis, one cannot help voting for the second option.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the anthology edited by Ackbar Abbas and John Nguyet Erni. For “de-Eurocentrizing” cultural studies see Robert Stam and Ella Sohat’s article.

<sup>3</sup> For Spivak’s definition of the subaltern see Spivak 1993; also Childs and Williams 1997.

To further complicate the issue, when it comes to cultural texts, which are far less complex than classical novels or outstanding contemporary fiction, can we still apply this method? Is there anything that these texts “hide” apart from the critics’, no doubt politically correct, assumptions? When cultural studies is becoming international, and there is both an institutional demand for more and more scholars practicing it and a political (or humanitarian) reason for using a theory that is sensitive to minorities and difference, what would be the best method for a cultural studies scholar to apply? My article offers an introduction to these complexities that haunt cultural studies and proposes a tentative step towards finding a methodology that keeps the political edge of the discipline yet does not silence its subject of analysis. I still believe in the possibilities that rhetorical reading offers, yet I do not think that such analyses reveal a hidden dimension that discourses of power repress. I trust, with Donna Haraway, that being self-conscious about the ideologies that are at work in our own discourses helps us to avoid falling into the trap of producing a redundant, predictable theory as well as a speculative construction that supposedly unveils the unconscious of the text, but, in fact, silences its subject of analysis.<sup>4</sup> In other words, I do not claim that there is no need for a firm theoretical stance, yet I believe that the framework we rely on should be as open as possible to enable the discourses of the non-English speaking world to emerge in dialogue with the all too assertive claims of cultural studies, and argue that it is the intersubjective approach, as it is defined by Jessica Benjamin, that helps to find this balance. Foucault once claimed that when he starts writing a book he has no idea what he will think at the end;<sup>5</sup> I think it is this attitude that a cultural studies scholar should keep in mind, both in the classroom and in the scholarly texts s/he produces.

## 2. Cultural Studies in Hungary

These issues are particularly significant in the East-Central European context. In Hungary, the Bologna system is applied to students who started their education in or after 2006, which means that, apart from a few majors, the former five-year-programmes were redesigned, and Hungary adopted the Bachelor/Master division. Simultaneously, more and more courses have been offered that take a cultural studies approach: scholars previously lecturing on literature have started teaching film and popular culture; new programmes and specializations were set up; Media Studies departments opened, and so on. Though there is no institutionalised cultural studies programme in Hungary, the approach has an impact on academic institutions; the English Department at the University of Debrecen, for instance, offers the BA course “Introduction to Literature and Visual Culture” at the beginning of the second year, which introduces students to the theory of Stuart Hall at an early stage of their studies. In other words, we are in the middle of appropriating this theory, and I believe that this historical period brings an unprecedented opportunity for scholars to rethink the models they apply.

In 2011 a volume titled *Comparative Hungarian Cultural Studies* was published by Purdue University Press, edited by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek and Louise O. Vasvári. The editors argue that we need a comparative framework for Eastern European cultural studies in order to renew

<sup>4</sup> See Haraway 1991, chapter on Situated Knowledges, 183–202.

<sup>5</sup> “If I had to write a book to communicate what I’m already thinking before I begin to write, I would never have the courage to begin” (Foucault 2000, 239).

Hungarian literary criticism, which is still often characterised by a positivist approach as well as a parochial stance. A comparative framework, as they claim, would help to resituate Hungarian literary and cultural criticism in a larger context, helping to incorporate repressed voices of ethnic minorities, the experience of women, and so on. Though I think that literary criticism is no longer insular in Hungary, especially if we take publications of scholars working in foreign language departments into account, I do believe that a flexible comparative approach would be beneficial for appropriating cultural studies in the Eastern European context.

One of the reasons why there might still be some resistance to cultural studies in Hungary stems from its affiliation with Marxism. Though the Birmingham school redefined classical Marxist terms, and Hall often calls himself “post-marxist,” arguing that he uses “marxist concepts while constantly demonstrating their inadequacy” (Morely 1996, 25), the primary interest in ideology and the politics of literary texts might seem like a step backwards for scholars for whom Marxism was the only approved interpretative model during the communist era. Nevertheless, it is much easier for (a younger generation of) critics working with theories of the postmodern, hermeneutics, or Foucauldian social theory to identify with the main assumptions of cultural studies; these scholars, taking the political/ideological nature of literature for granted, instead of resisting the approach in the name a purely aesthetic view of literature, would rather claim that theoretical assumptions of cultural studies are too shallow.

English Departments obviously play a significant role in introducing the approach in Hungary. A number of scholars have some form of “double consciousness,” and work both with English and Hungarian primary texts, which can lead to very productive analyses. I think cultural studies, or comparative cultural studies, is one of the theoretical frameworks that could help Hungarian scholars rethink literary history and the trauma of communism. Obviously, there are many other approaches available: trauma studies, psychoanalytic literary criticism, oral history, and so on; the list is long. Yet one thing is for sure: no matter which model one adopts, it is of primary importance to be aware of the fact that a theoretical school rooted in Western (post)modernity might not be entirely suitable to interpret the culture of the Second World. That is why we need to be “completely without innocence” (Haraway 1991, 151), as Haraway claims, and instead of passively accepting the truth-claims of these models, try to construct a theory that is conducive to the local context of analysis and is sensitive to subaltern histories and voices.

### **3. Cultural Education and the Subaltern**

In her recent collection that includes writings of at least twenty-three years, Spivak uses the term “double bind,” borrowed from Derrida to address the question of the rupture between race and class, body and mind, self and other, among other opposites as well as affinitive categories. The term originally comes from Gregory Bateson (1972), who used it to understand childhood schizophrenia; applied to the contemporary cultural scene, and endowed with a positive sense, Spivak argues that

“we can call this the double bind of the universalizability of the singular, the double bind at the heart of democracy, for which an aesthetic education can be an epistemological

preparation, as we, the teachers of the aesthetic, use material that is historically marked by the region, cohabiting with, resisting, and accommodating what comes from the Enlightenment” (Spivak 2012, 4).

Spivak’s insistence on harmonizing the contemporary double bind with the legacy of the Enlightenment might have something to do with her view of herself as “a white liberal feminist” (Childs and Williams 1997, 172), i.e., with the fact that she is aware of the discourses that empowered her to speak. The “aesthetic education,” which, as I understand it, includes cultural studies as well, prepares the student to grasp the contradictions involved in political categories such as democracy, and, in general, to have an open-minded, flexible attitude and the ability to tolerate opposites without intending to reduce them to either/or categories.

As for culture, Spivak defines it as “a package of largely unacknowledged assumptions, loosely held by a loosely outlined group of people, mapping negotiations between the sacred and the profane, and the relationship between the sexes” (Spivak 2012, 120). In other words, according to Spivak, there is a double bind in culture as well; though it might not be entirely clear what she means by negotiations between the sacred and the profane in this context (perhaps the phrase refers to the tension between a transcendental vision of culture as opposed to its experience as the practice of the everyday), it is clear that she perceives culture as an inherently paradoxical entity. While anthropology focuses only on the self-conscious part of cultural systems, Spivak claims that culture is, in fact, irreducible and “alive.” It contains an “incommensurable part” that lodges either in the academic notion of society, which is different from that of the practitioners, or in “the moving wedge of the metropolitan culture into which s/he has entered as a participant” (Spivak 2012, 120). In other words, the cultural studies scholar is able to perceive the complexities of culture in two ways: either in the gap that exists between academic discourse and culture as practice (a gap we have to be aware of, yet cannot really erase), or, in a more empirical sense, in the culture of the metropole, which s/he inhabits as an insider.

The stakes are high for Spivak: she does not talk about cultural education per se, but an aesthetic principle to be found in the humanities, claiming that we need this ivory tower of paradoxes and opposites in order to be receptive to political systems, cultures, and so on. Otherwise “the mind-numbing uniformization of globalization” (Spivak 2012, 2) and knowledge will minimize contradictions and transform the objects of knowledge into trivial, didactic categories. If there is a double bind for Hungarian critics lecturing on English culture, it does not only consist in the discrepancy between the language of the academy and culture as practice per se, but also in the tension between the models and paradigms we rely on and the culture we live. Yet this gap is not an infertile terrain to occupy, to use Salman Rushdie’s phrase (Rushdie 1991, 15); a number of essays in Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári’s volume that investigate the metropolitan culture of Budapest from the perspective of gender, race, or cultural citizenship, i.e., with the help of theoretical models stemming from the Western academia, present, though, unfortunately, quite often miss, excellent opportunities for an insightful analysis.

Though Spivak has been influenced by psychoanalysis, primarily Lacanian theory, she might not be aware of the correlations between her notion of the double bind and theories of intersubjectivity,

in the sense in which Jessica Benjamin uses the term. Similarly to Spivak, who relies on the aesthetics of Romanticism as well as the Enlightenment (Kant, Wordsworth, etc.), Benjamin uses Keats' famous term, "negative capability," to illuminate her notion of intersubjective interaction. To persevere in the approach of intersubjectivity, she argues, "requires of theory some of that quality which Keats demanded for poetry – negative capability. The theoretic equivalent of that ability to face uncertainty 'without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' would be the effort to understand the contradictions of fact and reason without any irritable reaching after one side at the expense of the other" (Benjamin 1993, 10). In other words, the toleration of uncertainty, paradox, and incongruity is not only theoretically desirable, but psychologically as well: it is an approach, as well as an attitude, that ensures mature intersubjective interaction and a non-narcissistic, non-ego centred perception of the outside world.

Hall's theory of culture is, I think, based on assumptions that go hand in hand with Spivak's theoretical framework and the intersubjective attitude. He argues that "[t]he only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency" (Morley 1996, 265–6), suggesting that there is a double play between resistance (holding on to what one thinks) and openness (letting the ideas have an impact on one's thinking) whenever one articulates a genuine theoretical stance. He describes his fight with Althusser in detail: "I felt, I will not give an inch to this profound misreading, this superstructuralist mistranslation, of classical Marxism, unless he beats me down, unless he defeats me in the spirit" (ibid., 266). Evoking the biblical story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel gives a transcendental dimension to the cultural critic's fight, and it also implies that there is a balance s/he needs to achieve between his presumptions and the new (hostile, alien, other) theory, which is, again, similarly to Benjamin's notion of intersubjectivity, based on the balance between submission (giving in to the new, to the ideal) and domination (imposing our views on others).<sup>6</sup>

Hall, similarly to Spivak, is not afraid to use terms reminiscent of Romantic aesthetics (Althusser has to defeat him *in the spirit*), which suggests that despite the Marxist (or "post-marxist") aspects of his theory, he does not simply think that individualism is an ideology, but pays attention to the distinctive, irreducible aspects of human subjectivity. When articulating his view of culture, he uses a similar rhetoric:

If you work on culture, or if you've tried to work on some other really important things and you find yourself driven back to culture, if culture happens to be what seizes hold of your soul, you have to recognize that you will always be working in an area of displacement. There's always something decentred about the medium of culture, about language, textuality, and signification, which always escapes and evades the attempt to link it, directly and immediately, with other structures. (Morley 1996, 271)

A view of culture seizing hold of one's *soul* reminds one of Shelley's view of poets as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Making sense of the insensible, the irreducible chaos that is called culture: this is the task of the critic who is defined as an "organic intellectual" (ibid., 267). What we witness here is, I think, another paradox between Hall's terminology recalling

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin claims that "domination and submission result from a breakdown of a necessary tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition that allows self and other to meet as sovereign equals" (Benjamin 1991, 12).

the romantic belief in individual uniqueness, and the profoundly materialist view of cultural discourses his theory is based on.

The term he uses to describe this role is, however, somewhat misleading. “Organic intellectual” is a phrase coined by Antonio Gramsci in his influential essay *The Formation of the Intellectuals*, referring to the fact that the intellectual is “organically” determined by the class into which he is born (Leitch 2001, 1183). Hall claims that “[t]he problem about the concept of an organic intellectual is that it appears to align intellectuals with an emerging historic movement and we couldn’t tell then, and can hardly tell now, where that emerging historical movement was to be found” (Morley 1996, 267). Jon Stratton and Ien Ang argue that Hall’s use of Gramsci’s term suggests that he mythologizes British cultural studies, since the historical conditions he outlined when assessing the birth of the Birmingham school (the growth of the mass media and consumer society) are by no means uniquely British phenomenon (*ibid.*, 372). Their point is that this rhetoric, despite Hall’s repeated claim that cultural studies did not emerge at the moment when he first met Raymond Williams, reveals that he presupposes a pure, original British version of the discipline (*ibid.*, 372).

Though it is true that Hall is nostalgic about the Birmingham School, I think he has never implied that cultural studies has a pure, uncontaminated origin. What he argues for is rather the need to have a genuine theoretical perspective, as opposed to producing articles and anthologies that apply an all too familiar framework. When speaking about the popularity of cultural studies in the US, he claims that “I don’t know what to say about American cultural studies. I am completely dumbfounded by it” (*ibid.*, 273), adding that “my own feeling is that the explosion of cultural studies along with other forms of critical theory in the academy represents a moment of extraordinarily profound danger” (*ibid.*). In a recent interview quoted by Michael Bérubé he gave an even more disappointed response: “I really cannot read another **cultural-studies** analysis of Madonna or *The Sopranos*” (Bérubé 2009). Perhaps this is the reason why Stratton and Ang perceive a romanticising impulse in his argument: a desire to posit a pure, genuine version of cultural studies as opposed to its institutionalised, “fluent” adaptation in the US. What Hall misses is, nevertheless, rather that ambiguous dimension created in the gap between openness to the other and holding on to one’s theoretical convictions. Perhaps his judgement is too harsh (cultural studies is, obviously, done in a number of different ways in the US), but his point is clear: there is no sense in reproducing arguments the conclusions of which we are able to predict after reading the title. If there is a future for cultural studies it lies in the gap between holding on to a theoretical paradigm and being attentive to the other *as other*.

## 4. Theory and Practice

As for more practical questions, let us take a look at what academics in English departments can do with the available cultural material. I already referred to the “double consciousness” these scholars tend to have, i.e., to the tension between teaching English culture, literature, and cultural theory, and the local context which inspires scholars to analyse, compare, and develop approaches that help to understand East-Central European perspectives as well. Therefore, we have to differentiate between what we can do in the classroom and what we can accomplish as

researchers, publishing both on English and Hungarian (or Slovenian) literary and cultural texts. The following considerations rely on an empirical basis, which is, obviously, a rather narrow terrain; I offer these insights as a tentative step towards understanding the Hungarian context of cultural studies. To put it very simply, my suggestions are the following: in the classroom we should keep the theoretical considerations of the double bind in mind but should not assign texts dealing with it to the group; as for the potentials concerning research, I think the most productive approach is to target the paradoxes as much as possible.

In the past few years, as I have already mentioned in the section on Hungarian cultural studies, new departments, specializations, and courses were designed that integrated the approach of the Birmingham School: the Media and Communications Studies Department at the University of Debrecen, for instance, or the Information and Communication Specialization offered by the Institute for English and American Studies. This latter is a two-year programme that BA students can take to supplement their education in English and American literature, culture, and linguistics. The courses on film, advertising, communication technologies, and the media are rather practical; their primary aim is to provide a relatively marketable degree for students working towards their BA in English Studies. I taught two courses in this programme, one on advertising, and another on the intersections of gender and media studies; while I consider the first a success, I had a number of problems with the second one, most of which were due to the difficulties of finding the balance between theory and practice.

For my course on advertising, I found Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements* (1978) the most helpful book. Even though her work can by no means be considered a recent contribution to the field, I think Williamson is one of the few authors who managed to construct a theory that is insightful, sophisticated and applicable at the same time. Her terms such as differentiation, referent system, and ideology are very helpful for students to become familiar with the language of advertising, and the theoretical approach is both accessible and thorough: her work draws on semiology and psychoanalysis, using a Lacanian framework to examine the manipulative strategies of images. Claiming that ads create a lack in order to be able to fill it, Williamson takes a leftist standpoint and claims that these images interpellate the audience. The group does not need to read Althusser, or even Stuart Hall, to become familiar with the main principles of ideological interpellation, i.e., the impact of cultural discourses on the subject. The book helps them give up their insistence on the freedom of choice (i.e., "if I do not want to buy a product I simply ignore the ads") and recognise that images speak to us in numerous ways apart from the obvious. Furthermore, since Williamson relies on semiology and reads advertisements as complex networks of signs, her theory is also helpful for students who intend to work in the advertising industry, since she gives obvious clues concerning the psychological impact of ads.

It is usually enough to mention a few examples: an ad from 1975, for instance, which depicts Catherine Deneuve, the French actress who often portrayed aloof and mysterious beauties in the late 60s is one of the favourite examples of Williamson, and much liked by students as well. The viewer, of course, has to be familiar with Deneuve and the femininity associated with her roles, but even if students do not recognize the famous actress, it is easy for them to identify the cold

beauty she embodies. I first show the image to the class for a few seconds, and ask them what they remember; it is usually the smile, the gaze, her beauty, and the overall impression of the ad. Then we analyse the image using the conceptual framework of Williamson, decoding the signifiers (the gaze, colours, positioning of objects, etc.), and point out how the transfer of meaning takes place from actress to object, how the object acquires meaning. Third, we try to guess what kind of audience the ad targets, how it invites the potential customer to construct a narrative of aloof feminine beauty, and how it manufactures lack in the process in order to be able to fulfil some kind of psychic need. Williamson does not believe that the audience is absolutely victimized by images, and claims that we participate in the construction of their meaning, which is an idea that is appealing to students; even though they tend to have a negative attitude towards the media, they usually do not see themselves as victims, and very seldom accept the Marxist concept of ideology as false consciousness either. With the help of Williamson's theory, then, it is possible to encourage students to think about advertising not simply as a detrimental industry which we can either avoid or be the victim of, but also help them see images as texts to decipher; the book makes them receptive to the double bind in culture without explicitly referring to Spivak's or Derrida's theory.

In other words, Williamson is able to find the right balance between theory and practice, which makes her book an excellent choice for introducing the main assumptions of cultural studies. Those writings that tend to focus on theory, even if they are more explicit about methodological questions, were not successful on this level. I tried to teach Donna Haraway's seminal article titled *Situated Knowledges* (from 1988, published in the volume *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 1991) as an introductory piece to my "Gender and media" course, presuming that her profound methodological guidelines would be useful as a starting point. The article addresses an issue that students of media studies need to redefine, namely: objectivity; it is concerned with the visual field; and the methodology it offers correlates with the considerations I outlined in the previous section of my paper. Still, it failed, and I think it failed for two reasons. First, her theory is too complex, and deliberately so (she attempts to parody post-structuralist approaches and uses intricate terms to ridicule their rhetoric), and second, her terms are confusing since she departs from their commonsensical meaning. "Partial perspective," for instance, which means an inevitable condition in her text (we cannot avoid having a specific perspective, which should be reflected on) was persistently misunderstood by a number of students, who presumed that it is something we have to correct in order to offer a more objective standpoint. All in all, it might be even more challenging to find the right theoretical texts to introduce cultural concepts than to choose the most suitable novels for literary courses; though it is inevitable to help students perceive the ideology of visual images, it is the image itself that should be the starting point, not the theory.

As for our role as researchers in Eastern and Central Europe, I think we have an unprecedented opportunity to contribute to the field of cultural studies, and it is only a question of time (and finance, of course) whether we will be able to accomplish in-depth cultural analyses. I wrote a book chapter a few years ago on the Hungarian classic the *Eclipse of the Crescent Moon* (*Egri csillagok*) by Géza Gárdonyi, which was published in 2007 in a new series titled *The Histories of Hungarian Literature*. *Eclipse* is probably the most famous Hungarian novel depicting the victory

of Hungarians over the Turks in 1552; it is taught in primary schools, and was voted most popular novel in 2005. My primary aim is to understand the somewhat irrational admiration of this text, and the contradiction (or double bind) between its popularity and the relative lack of scholarly interest in it. After its publication in 1901, *Eclipse* was read as a national epic, comparable to Homer's works; following the second world war, Marxist aesthetics had an impact on its reception, which was the compulsory theoretical framework of literary studies during communism, and critics saw it as the story of a peasant boy becoming a national hero; and recently, since 1989, most scholars researching the legacy of Gárdonyi argue that we need to reveal the worldview of the "real" author and get rid of "impurities" of ideological interpretations. In other words, there are hardly any analyses that treat the novel as a cultural phenomenon and attempt to understand the position it came to occupy over the past one hundred years. Instead, the books on Gárdonyi are still preoccupied with issues concerning authorial intention, assuming that it is possible to produce a text devoid of ideological assumptions.

## 5. Conclusion

I think it is a must to understand the post-Marxist concept of ideology in Eastern Europe, and, instead of attempting to reveal a pure, objective "worldview," as if it were possible to erase the traumas of the twentieth century by going back to uncontaminated originary ideas, reflect on the ideologies that are at work in our own discourses. Cultural studies provides an excellent theoretical framework for this, but if we are to offer a lasting contribution to the field, we have to find the balance between holding on to theoretical convictions and letting primary texts alter these. In order to avoid producing yet another cultural-studies analysis on Madonna or The Sopranos, we need to look for ways to transform the very models we are applying. Obviously, this is hard work, since instead of simply reading a few texts with the help of smart critical terms we have to study a great number of primary texts, the reception of novels, the history of books, among other issues. The methodological options are numerous, and I also believe that we should not refrain from offering our own readings of these texts, but cultural theory should only remain a tentative guideline for analysis; without being conscious of the ideologies we are (re)producing, and attempting to construct a paradigm that the local context itself induces, there is hardly any sense in doing cultural studies. It is my contention that the methodology outlined in this article makes it possible, though does not guarantee, that we remain attentive to subaltern voices.

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