

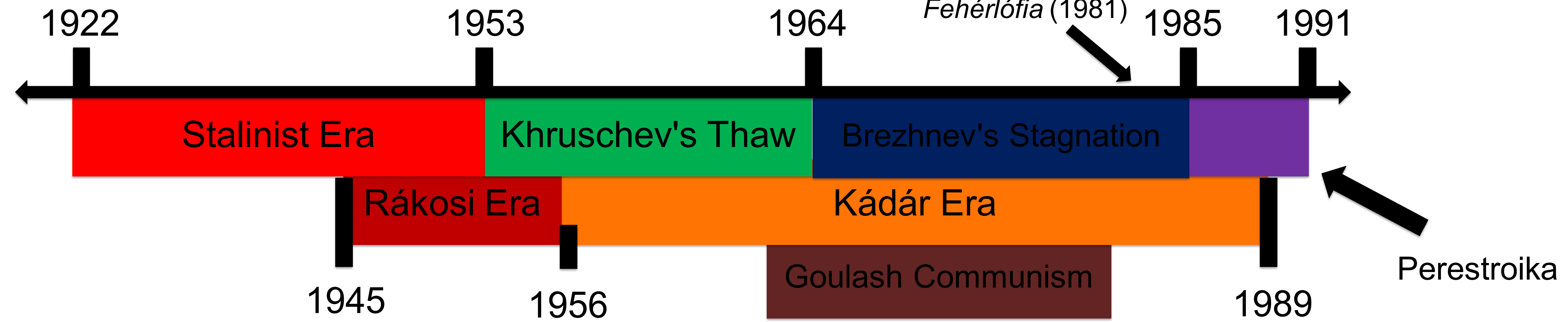
Son of the White Mare: Folklore and Postcolonialism in Marcell Jankovics' *Fehérlófia*

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The Soviet Context

Abstract

This study utilizes rhetorical criticism and postcolonialism in an effort of analyzing Marcell Jankovics' animated film *Fehérlófia*. A combination of postcolonialist theories are used, as well as an examination of Soviet era animation regarding rhetorical use. Attention is paid to the usage of folklore in conjunction with the film. Results from the study conclude that *Fehérlófia* showcases and further proves the use of narratives of change and inbetween peripherality in Hungarian film and literature during the late Kádár era.



Introduction

The majority of research on animation from within the Soviet era had focused on Russian animation, ranging from the depiction of women to the depiction of Russian superiority. In recent years, developments have been made in analyses of animations originating from Soviet satellite states, culminating in various papers and a book summarizing the history of native animation studios and their infamous directors and works. The extension of academic research into animation from the Iron Curtain has only been a newer facet in the direction of research aimed towards the Eastern and Central European countries. This movement ultimately culminated in the rise of inbetween peripherality and a postcolonialist narrative of change that could be seen in Hungary and other Eastern and Central European countries. The researcher postulates that Marcell Jankovics' 1981 film *Fehérlófia* serves as an unbounded example for showcasing these postcolonialist narratives of change. Various analyses of the film and its elements will be presented in order to build a logical scale to the researcher's own conclusion.

Methods

In the course of analyzing Jankovics' film, the researcher is following a mixed method approach of applying *Fehérlófia* through a lens of rhetorical criticism and postcolonialism. While they are interrelated forms of analysis, the former introduces a form of analysis in which it "explains how [the text] should be read and comprehended within a larger social context." However, postcolonialism is a broad, divisive field and warrants further discussion. Postcolonialism as a practice is used in a variety of schools of criticism and is thus separated into two subsets: postcolonial criticism and postcolonial theory. This study utilizes postcolonial theory, which enables general analysis to "go beyond traditional literary studies, encompassing social, economic, and political concerns of the colonized and colonizer". This study also looks to expand on other frameworks, such as Tötösy de Zepetnek's inbetween peripherality and his related narratives of change.

- Inbetween peripherality is a theoretical framework that establishes the existence of the Soviet Union as a secondary center of influence upon Central Europe, with Western Europe as a whole acting as the first. Central Europe being both geographically and historically between the East and West, they are also on the periphery of the two centers in a number of terms, such as economically, politically, and culturally. Thus, the Central European states are on the inbetween and peripheral.
- Tötösy de Zepetnek's narratives of change are a developed set of postcolonial analytical guidelines for Hungarian literature from 1979-99. The goal being that inbetween peripherality is noticeable within Central European literature spanning the two decades, as they showcase explicit sexuality through the male gaze, prominence of urbanity, memory, and eroticism as themes, as well as a shift in social status for the male author post-1989.

In the preliminary stages of this study, it was deemed necessary to understand the political and social context of Hungary as a Soviet satellite state before delving into the analytical parts of the study. While a full in-depth analysis is not needed, a basic understanding of Soviet rule, censorship laws, and the workings of animation studios is satisfactory.

- Stalinist Era – Period of rule for Joseph Stalin from 1922 to his death in 1953. Known for extreme policies, censorship, and secret police. Under Stalin, the Soviet Russian animation studio had been created.
- Khrushchev's Thaw – Nikita Khrushchev was selected as Stalin's replacement from 1953 to 1964. His leap between contradictory conservative and liberal policies had led his rule to be defined as The Thaw. His reign was felt throughout the Soviet Union and satellite states. Soviet animation had embraced state-sponsored usages of satire.
- Brezhnev's Stagnation – Leonid Brezhnev replaced Khrushchev in 1964 until 1982. A time in which official statements could not reference the Stalinist past, yet no innovation was offered in terms of ideological discourse. This had led to the people of the Soviet Union and bloc countries feeling as if a standstill had been met, the unspeakable past had been paired with an unforeseeable future. Many animations had utilized folklore to depict the Soviet people living under Stagnation, had also seen the Golden Age of Soviet animation.
- Perestroika – Translated as "reconstruction", ushered in by Mikhail Gorbachev after his placement as ruler of the Soviet Union. Its failure had led to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, preceded by revolutions across the Soviet Union and bloc states in 1989.
- Rákosi Era – Mátyás Rákosi had modeled his dictatorship over the Hungarian People's Republic after Stalin. Forming his own personality cult, his extreme orders for political assassinations had been branded as "salami tactics". Placed in charge by the Soviet Union in 1945, tensions between him and the people had boiled over into the 1956 revolution.
- Kádár Era – Following Soviet intervention in the 1956 revolution, János Kádár had been placed as the defacto ruler until his resignation in 1988. The communist government had fallen apart soon after. Characterized by a time of compromise between the government, the people, and upper Soviet echelons. Relative stability was achieved with a phase of mass economic and ideological reforms from the mid 1960's to 70's, known as Goulash Communism, and had steadied off Stagnation until the late 70's.

Discussion

Censorship: Within the Central Committee, György Aczél was the head of cultural policy, and thus in charge of censorship law. According to Czigányik and his study on censorship in literature, the word censorship itself was rarely used in official language, and the complex system under Rákosi was shortened. The reconfigured system was thus known as the "three T's", or "tiltott, túrt, támogatott", or in English as the three P's: promoted, permitted, or prohibited. These three categories were applied to works of an author or artist, and each category was linked to the scale of release their work was allowed. The system had also relied on the complete exclusion of certain topics. These topics varied from political taboo such as negatively speaking on the Soviet Union, Marxism, and the one-party system, to social taboos such as graphic depictions of sex and obscene language. However, official ideology had also included unwritten rules. The three T's were interpreted and implicated often separately based on each individual work an author or artist produced, creating no precedents in banning a creator from ever having a work published.

Folklore: The usage of folklore or elements of folklore was an extremely popular method for Soviet/Soviet bloc studios. Beginning with Maxim Gorky and his speech at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, he had supported the usage of folklore within state-approved literature and had pushed for its widespread use. Gorky had wanted folklore to be utilized as a source of structure and content in literature and film in order to appease adults in search of a distraction from life following World War II, but also doubling as a form of educating children through allegorical events. Special attention was paid in this study to Hungarian and Eurasian tribal folklore such as Shamanistic practices, as well as Magyar Pre-History.

***Fehérlófia*:** Marcell Jankovics' *Fehérlófia* is a 1981 Hungarian animated film produced under Pannonia Filmstudio. The film centers on Treeshaker, the son of the mythical white horse. Beginning with the white horse running from a chain-like snake, she takes refuge in a large tree before giving birth to her son. Later, when the child is able to walk, she tells him the story of three princes asking their father, the king storm spirit, and mother, the queen winter spirit, for their own wives and kingdoms. The sons are granted their wives and the kingdom is split into four to accommodate the princes. The fairy wives have been warned to keep away from the lock on the gates of Hell at the bottom of the kingdoms, yet their curiosity betrays them and the hordes of Hell are unleashed on the spirit family. Three dragons are among the horde, and kill the three princes, greatly weaken the king, and capture the queen in a chain-like snake contraption. In her attempt to flee capture, she had transformed into a magnificent white horse. The king reappears as a cloud in order to mate with the shackled queen in her horse form three times. The first two sons escape imprisonment upon birth, yet the third birth does not occur before the horse-queen herself escapes to the shelter of a large tree. The storytelling ends, and the small boy is nursed by his horse mother for fourteen years before being strong enough to lift up their tree home, earning him the name Treeshaker, yet killing his weak mother. Treeshaker then goes on a quest to the underworld to defeat the three dragons. On the way, he unites with his two brothers who help him retake their kingdoms and wives, restoring balance to the world.

Analyses: Cowen's basic analysis of the film and its anti-industrial elements dealing with the three dragons (statue, tank, and lastly the moving city). Jankovic in interviews spanning from the 1990s to 2020 has established his original vision of the film repeating itself, in essence summarizing the Hungarian Shamanistic view of the Eternal Reoccurrence. When *Fehérlófia* is viewed in the upper Soviet context and applied to Tötösy de Zepetnek's narratives of change, inbetween peripherality is readily available. However, Jankovics offers his own creation of a specific fusion of Catholicism and Hungarian Shamanism/Eurasian Shamanism and folklore. This mixture helps aid the idea of a national identity and canon being seen in *Fehérlófia*, separating Hungary and its Eurasian counterparts from the industrial Soviet future, however yet embracing it, nonetheless. This embracement of the industrial city at the end of the film cements Hungary into modern industrialism, staving off the previous goal of freedom for the kingdoms of the summer, winter, spring, fall, and storm spirits. Women in the film, besides mother figures, are highly sexualized and are under the male gaze. This goes beyond the fairy wives and White Mare, but into the sexualization of the Earth itself as it provides for Treeshaker. The fairy wives are also seen as providing food to their respective dragon husbands. Eroticism is present beyond women, with Treeshaker's sword often taking the image of a phallic object in the Presence of an attractive woman.

Importance and Limitations: The importance of this study is found in the need for a better understanding of oppressed peoples across the globe and how they find sanctity from their oppressors. Furthermore, Soviet satellite states have often been overlooked in studies regarding postcolonialism due to their negative regard toward the subject due to their inherent picking of an identity that is either East or West, as it is only recently that a defined Central Europe has come to be claimed. This study adds to the few academic discussions of Soviet bloc animation, specifically Hungarian animation, and how it has utilized folklore to portray messages against official ideology. A major limitation was the lack of many backing studies regarding Soviet bloc animation. A minor limitation was the study's focus on just one film, as the initial study was applying a method outlining futurism, however no subsequent literary movement had followed or preceded the film to justify the claim.

Acknowledgements

Faculty Mentors: Dr. Edit Nagy (UF), Dr. Nik Bajorek (SF)

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