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**The Essential Channels of Performativity in
Géza Csáth's Writing**

Thesis booklet



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Background of the research

The oeuvre of Géza Csáth, which contains several draughtsmanships and disciplines, was surrounded by silence through decades after his death. His selected storybooks from the 1960s mainly focused on the psychoanalytics and the morphinist doctor-writer, and based on his canonized short stories, this direction and approach still serves as a guideline for the researches connected to his oeuvre, which was strengthened in the last decades by the republication of his diaries and correspondence.

By contrast, Csáth was known and mentioned as a musician by his peers and colleagues at the time of the publication of *The Magician's Garden*, lyrically portrays evanescent atmospheres and soft whiffles. It was not a coincidence, because he wrote hundreds of music criticisms and music aesthetics texts as one of the most famous music critics in the era, furthermore, the number of his own, extant compositions by manuscript is estimated to be more than 160 pieces (based on our current knowledge). However, the professional discourse

did not know anything about Csáth's compositions until the middle of the 1990s, when thanks to his daughter, Olga Brenner, a significant part of his sheet musics and musical scores by manuscript was taken to the collection of National Széchényi Library. In my research, I reflect on the question, what other reasons and circumstances led to the fact that the biographic reading method of his works became the main voice in the reception history in the last decades, while it's musician relation was pushed into the background.

Although, since the publication of *The Magician's Garden* in 1908 several colleagues of Csáth, literary historians and musicographers referred to the composer and music critic hiding in the background of his short stories' formal notes, no research has been prepared that would examine the formal and content relations, connections between his short stories, music aesthetics texts and compositions, as a structure. The main intention of my dissertation is to broaden the possible reading methods of the short stories to balance the biographical approach of the professional discourse around the oeuvre.

Research methodology

In my dissertation I prove and illustrate through the interpretation of ten short stories (*Evening, Summer Ball, The Blue Boat, Afternoon Dream, The Pass, Szonáta pathétique, 9th Symphony, Spring Overture, Springs, Eroica*) and two musical dramas (*Small Town History, Ash Wednesday*) that the draughtmanships – above all literature and music – creates an inseparable unit in Csáth's texts. In his music aesthetics texts he deals with the problematics of literature, music and visual arts' frontier and their applicability, the similarities of grammar and the expressions of different draughtmanships and their combination, drawing on his neurologist, psychoanalytical approach. Art and science were equal in his complex, holistic views.

The topics of the two groups of short stories I analyzed (short stories imitated by composer technology; short stories function as musical compositions) are characteristically musicals, as they evoke compositions regarding their structure or effects on the recipient. In the short stories musical charge manifests in different ways,

forms and aims: acoustic level of words and sentences, rhythm; returning and varying motifs in the structure; the limited expressing ability of literary text; compositions, content elements which evoke compositions and the composers' character, life; musical genres and their textual reproduction; typographical signs which evoke compositions; use of musical terms and expressions; sound and narration of musical instruments. However, these texts create a unit because of their similar content and form, motifical system, the alteration of main and side topics, and they are able to make a dialogue with each other.

Csáth saw musical dramas as the top of comprehensive artwork and similarly to musical forms, he built their construction according to the mechanism of nervous system and physiology. During the artwork, he was dealing with the question: how text, music and vision could complement and compensate each other, and also how could one extinguish the effect of the other. The *Ash Wednesday* – which is the transcription of *The Magician Dies* short story and in 1911 it was presented in the Hungarian Theater – is the only one of his dramas

which has entirely remained incidental music in several variation and it was played on piano by the author on the premier, therefore we could regard it as a philological curiosa. The compositions by manuscript connected to the interpreted short stories and musical dramas are provided in the appendix of the dissertation.

The results of the research

In my paper during the analysis I attempted to reveal that Csáth's short stories, musical experiences, compositions and music critics are built, joined and supplemented each other. Countless allusions and parallelism smolder between them without which these short stories' interpretation would remain fragmental. The interpreted short stories and music aesthetics texts show that although we know Csáth nowadays as an author of short stories, music was on the top of his hierarchy of arts he was thinking as a composer and he created several of his short stories this way. His texts trigger scientifically based effects and feelings of compositions

in the recipient by disturbing the nonconscious, evoking, emerging and flushing memories.

During my research, it became certain that Csáth's writing is significant in the turn of the century's Hungarian prose from the aspect of intermediality of literature and music, and the musicality of his prosepoetics is unique in the era which would motivate the reconsideration and reposition of his oeuvre and role in the canon as well.

Publications related to the research

„A megtisztulás aktusa a vízben, a hóban, a sárban. Egy narratíva kompozíciós lehetőségei – Csáth Géza: Tavaszi ouverture”. In *A varázsló kertje. Tanulmányok Csáth Gézáról*. Szerkesztette MOLNÁR Eszter Edina, PARÁDI Andrea, RADVÁNSZKY Anikó, 47–61. Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 2023.

„»Halk szárnylebbenések hallatszanak a levegőben...«. Zenei formabontás Csáth Géza Este című novellájában.” In *„A rejtelem volt az írósága...”*. *A ködlovag-jelenség történeti, poétikai és biografikus vetületei a századfordulótól napjainkig*. Szerkesztette LUDMÁN Katalin, RADNAI Dániel Szabolcs, 89–96. Miskolc: Miskolci Egyetem Irodalomtudományi Doktori Iskolája, 2022.

„Nézőpontváltások (Smaragd asztal. Csáth Géza válogatott levelezése)”. *Tiszatáj* 76, 1. sz. (2022): 115–117.

„A megtisztulás aktusa a vízben, a hóban, a sárban. Egy narratíva kompozíciós lehetőségei: Tavaszi ouverture; Egybehangzó szimfóniák: Tavaszok”. *Kortárs* 66, 9. sz. (2022): 20–28.

„Hangok transzcendenciája. Csáth Géza: Szonáta pathétique”. In *Az emlékező képzelőerő. Konferenciakötet*. Szerkesztette NAGY Beáta, SURÁNYI Beáta, UJVÁRI Nóra, 45–56. Budapest: Reciti, 2021.

„A függőség lélekrajza (Szajbély Mihály: Csáth Géza élete és munkái. Régimódi monográfia)”. *Tiszatáj* 74, 10. sz. (2020): 84–85.

„»Kabaré-komponista vagyok«. A parodista Csáth Géza gúnydrámája”. In *SZITU Kötet 2018*. Szerkesztette DOMA Petra, 98–111. Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Collegium, 2019.

„A medializált zenei elbeszélés érzékelési tapasztalata. A novellába ágyazott opera áthallásai”. In *Szövegek között 21. A tudományos hálózatoktól a hálózatok tudományáig (OTDK-tanulmányok)*. Szeged: Szegedi Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 2019.

„A dekadencia útvesztőjébe (Csáth Géza: Sötét örvénybe süllyedek. Naplófeljegyzések és visszaemlékezések 1914–1919)”. *Kortárs* 63, 3. sz. (2019): 89–92.

„Műfajok keresztmetszetében. A dráma árnyalatai Csáth Géza Hamvazószerda című művében”. *Tiszatáj* 71, 10. sz. (2017): Diákmelléklet, 1–26.

„Egy Wagner-opera parafrázisa. Csáth Géza: Délutáni álom”. In *A fantázia hippogriffje. A romantikus képzelőerő elbeszélhetősége*. Szerkesztette NAGY Beáta, SURÁNYI Beáta, UJVÁRI Nóra, 223–233. Budapest: Reciti, 2017.