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Short poem, self-portrait poem, drawing poem
Word-and-image relationships in late modern and
recent Hungarian poetry

Thesis booklet

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1. Background of the research

In my dissertation, I examine three types of poems in late modern and recent Hungarian poetry: the short poem, the self-portrait poem, and the drawing poem. I have already dealt with the short poem and the self-portrait poem in the framework of the National Scientific Students' Associations Conference, so the results of my research there served as a starting point for my current research. In the process of linguistic, poetic, and rhetorical delimitation of the poem types, it became clear that *word-image relations* play a prominent role in these texts. The short poems attract visual paratexts because of their 'hands and feet' absence, the self-portrait poems through the figure of ekphrasis and the genre *pandan* in the visual arts, while the drawing poems can be interpreted in this respect because of their predominance of imagery in the medium. The question posed by Gottfried Boehm in his essay *A képleírás* can stand as a succinct summary or illustration of my research: „*But why did the image have to be silenced and speech blinded? When they were mutually capable of brilliantly illuminating and complementing each other?*”¹

In my opinion, the corpus of texts analysed confirms Boehm's point that image and word are mutually illuminating and complementary. In addition to the poetic delimitation of these poem

¹ Gottfried BOEHM, *A képleírás*, trans. RÓZSAHEGYI Edit = *Narratívák I. Képelemzés*, ed. by Beáta THOMKA, Kijárat, Budapest, 1998, 19.

types, my research has focused on the prominent role of visual mediality in the reception of these poem types.

In my 2015 National Scientific Students' Associations Conference thesis (*„Kéz és láb nélküli” költészet. Weöres Sándor, Oravecz Imre és Simon Márton rövidversei (egysorosok, kétsorosok, polaroidok)*), I examined the Hungarian lyrical-historical survival of the poetic tradition of the short poem, which is assumed to be a genre. I hypothesized that through the 'one-liners poems' of Sándor Weöres, the 'two-liners poems' of Imre Oravecz's *Héj* and the numbered short poems of Márton Simon's *Polaroids*, a multifaceted exploration of this genre trend from late modern to contemporary poetry could be identified.

In my 2017 National Scientific Students' Associations Conference thesis (*„S a szárny is voltam és az ég is, arcmon túli arc a kékben...” Önarckép-versek a késő- és posztmodern magyar költészetben*), I examined the 20th century manifestations of the self-portrait as a genre, a prominent area of the intersection between literature and visual art. My research was concerned with exploring the art historical background, delineating the boundaries of the self-portrait genre, compiling a corpus of texts, and mapping the textual and visual self-presentation of subjectivity.

2. Research methodology and structure of the thesis

The key term of my dissertation is "word-and-image relation", which I borrowed from Áron Kibédi Varga's taxonomy. There are many possibilities for the appearance of word and image within the same work of art, and Áron Kibédi Varga gives a precise description of the possibilities of the relationship between the two media in his art-theoretical study entitled *A szó-és-kép viszonyok leírásának ismérvei*.² In his taxonomy, Varga Kibédi distinguishes between *identical* (word and image are completely fused) and *separated* (word and image are distinguishable) spatial accessibility based on disposition. He further divides the separated relation into three categories: coexistence, interreference, and coreference. *Coexistence* is when the word and the image are located in the same space, or when the image serves as a base and the words appear as a caption (for example, in the case of posters). *Interreferentiality* is when the word and the image are separated but are still on the same page and therefore refer to each other (for example, in the case of illustrations and paintings with titles). The concept of *choreferencia* covers the relationship when word and image do not appear on the same page, but (independently of each other) both refer to the same thing in the outside world (for example, in the case of a painting and a poem about a historical event).

² Áron KIBÉDI VARGA, *A szó-és-kép viszonyok leírásának ismérvei = Kép, fenomen, valóság*, ed. Béla BACSÓ, Kijárat, Budapest, 1997, 300-320.

The texts of the three poetry types analysed in my thesis have a strong visual connection. There is also a connection between them in terms of the relation between word and image, with identical and separated dispositions. In the case of the short poem, the imagery inherent in the language itself and the condensing power of poetic images are captured. In addition, the pictorial paratext and typographical representation are an extension of the text's imagery. The visual determinacy of the self-portrait poem is outlined as a result of the genre *pandan* found in the visual arts, which can be seen as the starting point of the poem type, and the ekphrasis associated with it through portrait painting. The drawing poems, a sub-genre of visual poetry, give rise to an intermedial investigation through the predominance of the medium of the line drawings and ideogram-like symbols they contain.

In the case of the three types of verse, the problem is not only the question of imagery but also the readability of the texts as lyrics. While the poetic quality of the self-portrait poems is not in question, the short poems and the drawing poems raise the problem of the poetic minimum. From the point of view of form, it is clear that a poetic text can exist without poetic content (such as a sonnet or an advertising poem), but it is questionable whether poetry can exist in a form of text that lacks the rhythm and line structure that are the basic conditions of a poem. The works analysed in this thesis fit best into the framework of free verse, which is separated by its borderline position not only from the metrical verse but also from live speech and prose. I interpret the short poem and the drawing poem, which can be classified as

belonging to the borderland of lyricism, as poems along the lines of Béla Vilcsek's category of the *free verse with its line structure*.³ Furthermore, the visible structurality of the lyric is of particular importance for the poetics of the thesis. Although it is a free verse, and therefore the tonality and metre are relegated to the background, the 'pattern' of sound remains as a visual construction.

Besides the *Introduction* dealing with the issue of visibility and the *Summary* presenting the research results, the dissertation is structured into three major chapters (*The Short Poem, The Self-Portrait Poem, The Drawing Poem*). In the chapter on the *Short Poem* I examined the Hungarian poetic tradition of the short poem as a stylistic category through the one-line short poems of Sándor Weöres, the two-line short poems of Imre Oravecz's *Héj* and the numbered short poems of Márton Simon's *Polaroids*. The text corpora analysed contain lyrical short forms that have no standardised nomenclature in poetry theory, and therefore, for the most part, thinking about them has remained within the boundaries of the oeuvres. In this chapter, I will first deal with the reception of these groups of poems, then I will explore the genre specificities of the short poem and the lyric-theoretical and lyric-historical questions they raise, and finally, I will deal with a comparative linguistic-poetic analysis of these poem cycles and volume compositions and their influence-historical relationships.

³ Béla VILCSEK, *Szabadvers és szabad vers - napjaink költészetében = Ritmikai és retorikai tradíció a kortárs magyar lírában*, eds Oszkár BOROS, Lívía ÉRFALVY, Kornélia HORVÁTH, Ráció, Budapest, 2011.

In the chapter on *The Self-Portrait Poem*, I examine a prominent area of intersection between literature and the visual arts, the late modern and recent works of the self-portrait poem genre. The term 'self-portrait poem' is in itself contradictory, since it defines a literary form, the poem, which is essentially verbal, though also capable of conveying imagery, through visual art, or more precisely, through painting. The name implies a reference to the image or the visual arts and a quasi-exclusive visual representation. The reception of poetry reveals the dual mediality of the lyric: in the process of interpretation, the recipient is affected by both the visual and the musical self-representation of the text. There are border areas between literature and visual art where the medium of word and image can be closely connected in formal representation. In the case of the picture poem or figurative poem, for example, the text elements (letters, words, verse lines, stanzas) are arranged in a specific graphic-typographical way, which gives the work as a whole its own graphic and typographical dimension, the graphic segmentation of the inscription being just as much a meaning-forming element as the semantic meaning plane of the text, and the two together provide the possibility of interpretation. In the self-portrait poem, however, in contrast to the figurative poem, the image of self-representation takes on an imaginary character, the inscription and materiality of the text play no role in interpretation, and this type of poem therefore requires a new approach. In the course of my research, I considered it my task to define the boundaries of this type of poem more precisely, to compile the necessary corpus of research, and to explore the discursive possibilities of visual

representability and the textual and visual self-presentation of subjectivity.

The last chapter of my thesis, the third pillar of my doctoral research, is the 20th century drawing poems, which have received little attention from the reception point of view. The figurative poems (calligraphy, picture poems, etc.) that appeared during the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde periods are considered to be the heyday of visual poetry, and are still in the focus of the reception of the visual poetry of the present day) received and still receive quite a lot of professional resonance, the word-and-image forms in Dezső Tandori's poetry, which I call "drawing poems", are built up from the poet's handwriting and hand-drawings (e.g. *A versreszelő*; *A múlt idő jele t (tt)* poems or the drawing poems in Sándor Weöres' manuscript book) have remained largely unreflected in the reception of individual works of his life and in literary studies discourse. I believe that the genre delineation of the drawing poems and the detailed examination of the works that can be classified under this category may prove productive not only for the sake of a more thorough exploration of the oeuvre but also from a lyrical theoretical point of view, because in this way - in addition to the pictorial paratextus of the short poems and the imaginary of the self-portrait poems - the lyrical representation of the "word-and-image" relations may be illuminated from a third aspect.

3. The new results

The main results of the dissertation are the delimitation, genre-theoretical, and stylistic analysis of the poem types of the *short poem*, the *self-portrait poem*, and the *drawing poem*, as well as the exploration and analytical presentation of the text corpus belonging to these poem types. The *short poems*, *self-portrait poems*, and *drawing poems*, which I frame and then discuss as poem types, can be regarded as micro-phenomena of post-modern Hungarian lyric poetry that testify to the transformation of the linguistic experience of the period, and its turn towards visuality. I believe that the specific idiom of the three types of verse analysed is an important imprint of the medialisation of the 20th century, and thus they can tell us something new about the period as a whole.

In my dissertation, I sought to answer the question of the inter-functionality and interpenetrating interrelation of word and image, language, and visuality in poetry through texts situated on the borderlands of lyricism. I am confident that the analyses of the works, interwoven like a web, can be more than themselves, able to point out the significance of poems that have not yet been on the horizon of the literary public's interest.

4. Publications related to the thesis

Bianka Zámbo, *Rajzolható és reszelhető-e a vers? Gondolatok Tandori Dezső rajzverseiről*, Tiszatáj, 2023/3, 72-80.

Bianka Zámbo, Bálint Buday, „Hogy ki ne jöjjünk a gyakorlatból” = Dezső Tandori, „...most már csak néz beszédem”, Tiszatáj, Szeged, 2023, 267-278.

Zámbo Bianka, „*Ut pictura poesis*” *Az intermedialitás megjelenési formái Tandori Dezső költészetében* = Márfai Molnár László, Pásztory Zoltán (eds.), *Az alkalmazott művészet létmódjai és a kreatív ipar kihívásai napjainkban*, Soproni Egyetem Kiadó, Sopron, 2023, 72-80.

Bianka Zámbo, „Ördöglatat, angyalhinta: van-e rá tinta?” *Tandori Dezső Ördöglatat című kötetének rajzversei*, Forrás, 2022/12, 15-49.

Bianka Zámbo, „*Mosolyomból – mézzel tele – kilóg, pléhből, létem nyele.*” *Az önarckép-versek hagyományvonalának rajzolata a 20-21. századi magyar költészetben* = Sándor Bene, István Dobos (eds.) *Folytonosság és megszakítottság a magyar kultúrában*, Budapest, Nemzetközi Magyarástudományi Társaság, 2022, 444-453.

Bianka Zámbo, *A líra peremvidékének szükséztávúsága, avagy a rövidvers és rokon műfajainak vizsgálata* = Jakab Daróczi, Hajdu Ildikó (eds.), *Határok és határátlépések*, Eötvös József Collegium, Budapest, 2022, 158-170.

Bianka Zámbo, „*a tücsökszó fokozza a fogfájást.*” *Malcolm de Chazal és Weöres Sándor költészetének találkozásai a rövidversek talaján* = Kornélia Horváth, Sarolta Osztrólczy (eds.) *A modern magyar líra/próza világirodalmi kontextusban*, Budapest, Kijárat Kiadó, 2020, 136-143.

Bianka Zámbo, „*Kéz és láb nélküli*” *költészet. Weöres Sándor, Oravecz Imre és Simon Márton rövidversei (egysorosok, kétsorosok, polaroidok)*, Partitúra, 2015/2, 41-60.