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THESES OF THE PHD DISSERTATION

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEXT AND BODY IN PILINSZKY'S
OEUVRE AND IN CONTEMPORARY HUNGARIAN LITERATURE
(SZILÁRD BORBÉLY AND JUDIT ÁGNES KISS)**

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THE TOPIC AND METHODOLOGY OF THE DISSERTATION

The first question that might come to mind regarding this topic is: Why did I choose these three poets particularly? The reception of János Pilinszky's work is one of the most extended topics of Hungarian literary theory. Several books, papers and essays appeared on his poetry, while others discussed his prose; there are even some who dealt with his plays written for the stage. I give a detailed account on some of these works in the Pilinszky-section regarding the history of literary reception. However, I believe that the reception so far leaves something to be desired.

It might not be an exaggeration to say that the highlightings and prioritization of critiques influences how we see Pilinszky's - and other author's - poesy and oeuvre as a whole. In my thesis, I am providing a new way of thinking about these questions and directions. One thing that is lacking is the detailed linguistic - poetic investigation of the poems in the volume *Trapéz és korlát*. Looking at the texts closely can help us deepen and widen our understanding of Pilinszky, even more so because body-poesy is most visible in this volume, which is always there in his works with less or more intensity.

In Pilinszky's case presenting the self in the text or on the other hand, unrepresentability, complete neutralization or conscious destruction of it is a poetic method that follows through the whole oeuvre. His body-texts are not as outstanding parts of his work as the ones building on biblical-mythical motifs, however no one can deny their presence. I believe that by taking issue with the body - and most of the time it is taking issue with the other's body, giving space to

intersubjectivity this way-yields a new field for self-representation. This makes for such a new and complex connotation network that enriches our understanding of Pilinszky's work). His work attests to such a quality of subjective poesy that goes beyond classical modernism in poesy and aesthetics, taking steps to a new subjectivity.

Szilárd Borbély's lyrical work and oeuvre is one of the most outstanding of Hungarian contemporary literature. Each piece of the now closed corpus left a mark in critical reception already at the publication - as I explain this in detail in the related subsection - especially in the case of volumes, *Halotti Pompa*, *A Testhez* and *Nincstelenség*. In Szilárd Borbély's representation and destruction of the self is a corner stone of the texts, just like with Pilinszky. This serves as a basis for the unique body-poesy that builds on several different traditions (theology, mythology, literary theory) and makes all poems of Borbély outstanding. The subjectivity of these poems unfolds in the rhetoric of the substitute victim: lyrical persona, mythological figures or stories showing up in the poems represent a different layer of this particular subjectivization.

Judit Ágnes Kiss's poems and the volume, *Négyezőg*, analyzed in the thesis focuses on identity, self and body and the representations of them in the text. Specific masks appear in the poems - mentioned several times in pieces of reception - which are the main building blocks of subjectivity in the texts. The lyrical voice of Judit Ágnes Kiss is completely different from Pilinszky's or Borbély's. However, there are two points that connects her work to the other two mentioned above, namely the new form of subjectivization, and the topicalization of death. Death, passing and

murder are central motifs in the case of all three authors. It is important to note how the respective corpora uses poetic and rhetoric forms to represent these ideas, how they build on earlier traditions, or turn already existing poetic concepts upside down.

The question of genre is a crucial starting point of interpretation both in the case of Szilárd Borbély and Judit Ágnes Kiss, also the point of view of lyrical persona, their language or even their biological and social gender could provide an important line of understanding.

In my thesis I attempted an analysis of these works that besides drawing the curve of effect by themselves, they enter into a dialogue with each other. Apart from focusing on body-poesy and body-representation, I described new interpretative directions that shed light on the linguistic-poetic characteristics of the works, and investigate their workings, transformations and reconfigurations.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The relationship between text and body in Pilinszky's oeuvre and in contemporary Hungarian literature (Szilárd Borbély and Judit Ágnes Kiss) – this thesis examines the relationship between body and text in the works of the above mentioned three poets focusing on the interpretation of the poesy of the human body and its representation in literary texts.

The main focus of the paper is the interpretive language and poesy of the poems, although the analysis is based on literary theoretic and philosophical argumentation, mostly existentialism,

phenomenology and the discourse of body-representation. *Affair* is a key motif in the poems - and thus reading them side by side - of all three poets. This motif can be seen in relationships between self and the world, self and the other and the relationship of self to itself, while all of these are topicalized through different processes of subjectivation.

Following the introduction (I.), I give an overview of body-representation, body-poetry, body and identity (II.). Section III dealing with Pilinszky is divided into smaller subsections. In the first subsection (1.) I present the most important statements of the Pilinszky reception and pose the questions following which I will analyze the poems. Next I turn to the analysis of the text *A szerelem sivataga* (2.), then follows the body-poetry analysis of several Pilinszky texts (3.). In subsection 4, I analyze the volume *Trapéz és korlát*, with a special focus on love poems; in subsection 5, I turn to Pilinszky's self-portraits. Subsection 6 deals with poems built around the motif of eating and food. Finally, taking a little detour, I present parallel reading to the motives arching over volumes (7.).

Section IV of the thesis discusses the poetry of Szilárd Borbély, with an emphasis on two volumes of the 'second period', *Halotti Pompa* and *A Testhez*. In the analysis I consider the question of genre, the particular poetry specific to Borbély mixing cultural, religious and philosophical views (1.), I lament on the substitute victim rhetoric (2.) that is the one of the main building motifs throughout both volumes. Then I provide analysis to some of the poems in *Halotti Pompa* (3.) and *A Testhez* (4.).

The last part of the dissertation dealing with interpretation investigates Judit Ágnes Kiss's volume, *Négyszög* (V.), keeping in

mind the questions of roleplay, genre, and linguistic plays, all of which are the way of constructing identity both for persona addressed and persona speaking in the poems. The analyses also mention points of the women voice/language and standpoints (in self-identification). In section VI., I summarize the results of my research and give the direction to further research.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The three authors represent three different time periods and worlds: Pilinszky as one of the last representatives of late modernism and a forerunner of ‘classical’ postmodernism, Szilárd Borbély as an outstanding member of postmodernism, and Judit Ágnes Kiss as a post postmodern poet. The analyses presented in my thesis focus on the similarities and differences, keeping in mind *rewriting/interpreting, living literature, changing relations and tradition.*

The (Hungarian) literary history and interpretation move in different cultural and theoretic spaces in different periods. Body-representation in the Pilinszky-interpretation could open up a whole new chapter in reception, it could also give new points of reference for interpretation.

For this reason I am convinced that an analysis of Pilinszky’s work centered around the body-representation does not take it out of the traditional stream of interpretation: it enters into a dialogue with earlier interpretations analyzed on metaphysical grounds, bible-hermeneutics or existentialism. I believe that because on the one

hand the analyses found in this thesis started out from those earlier analyses, on the other hand, body-representation and merely thinking about the body is deeply rooted in the former traditions as well - consider phenomenology for instance.

At the same time, looking at bodies of texts such as love poems, even if they cannot stir up the interpretive tradition, they can provide a new aspect to analyses.

The reception just started processing the oeuvre of Szilárd Borbély the past couple of years. The corpus that met a tragic and quick end has slammed the interpreters in a blink of an eye, and it presses the literary theorists to place it as soon and as appropriately in the dimensions of Hungarian literature as possible in the least amount of time. Body-representation is a straightforward track of interpretation in the case of *Halotti Pompa* and *A Testhez*, but there are numerous other interpretative laxers for future research that can shift the Borbély reception out of body-representation. In my thesis I tried to give some new ways of interpretation to these texts, with a special emphasis on genre, and cultural-mythological embeddedness.

In addition, the particular theology of the Borbély texts is a special domain of the oeuvre that contains countless exciting starting points for interpretation. I find that although Szilárd Borbély calls his perspective on the Christian and Jewish tradition a kind of blasphemy, he has several different ties holding him to them on mythological, liturgic, and mystical grounds. His poems are characterized by a sense of being in between the testaments, looking at them through linguistic-poetic lenses and concentrating on motifs could be a direction for future research.

Judit Ágnes Kiss's poetry and oeuvre is still in the making. The volumes of poetry and prose published so far show a strong poesy, the texts are constructed through conscious poetic, rhetoric and genre blocks.

Though it might seem strange to put her poems together with Pilinszky's and Borbély's, I still believe that this is justified on several points. On the one hand, Judit Ágnes Kiss is closely connected to the same tradition that uses a motif and conscious planning of cycles in a volume. On the other hand, in some of her poems death is a central motif, just like it is with the other two authors. The woman voice speaking in the Borbély-legends/myths is radically intensified in Judit Ágnes Kiss's poems, in a way continuing the theme and poesy of Borbély's *A Testhez*.

PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE THESIS

- *Eleven étetek vagyok.” – A Pilinszky-líra újabb értelmezési lehetőségeiről = Leírás és értelmezés. Újholdas szerzők a hagyománnyá válás közben, szerk. BUDA Attila, NEMESKÉRI Luca, PATAKY Adrienn, Ráció Kiadó, Bp., 2016.*
- *Szerepjáték, műfajjáték, nyelvjáték – Kiss Judit Ágnes költészetéről = „...kettős, egymást tükröző világban”. Poétikai formációk a késő- és a posztmodern magyar lírában, szerk. BOROS Oszkár, HORVÁTH Kornélia, OSZTROLUCZKY Sarolta, Gondolat Kiadó, Bp., 2015.*
- *Vonzás és taszítás. Egy elfelejtett szerelmi líra. Pilinszky János: Trapéz és korlát = Hungarológiai Közlemények, 2015/4. (<http://epub.ff.uns.ac.rs/index.php/hk/article/view/1537>)*
- *„...amiről csak hasonlatok beszélnek”. A köztesség poétikája Babits Mihály, Pilinszky János és Petri György egy-egy versében = Babits és kortársai, szerk. MAJOROS Györgyi, SIPOS Lajos, TOMPA Zsófia, Napkút Kiadó, Budapest, 2015, 367-377.*
- *„a néma tenger arcomba világít”. Pilinszky János „arc-kép-verseiről”= Test-konceptusok és test-reprezentációk az irodalomban és a kultúrában, szerk. BOROS Oszkár, HORVÁTH Kornélia, OSZTROLUCZKY Sarolta, VARRÓ Annamária, ZSUPPÁN Klaudia, Gondolat Kiadó, 2014, 42-51.*
- *Metafora, metafizika, mitológia. Pilinszky János: A szerelem sivataga = Az ideál mindazonáltal megőrződik - Tanulmányok Bécsy Ágnes tiszteletére, szerk. HORVÁTH Kornélia – OSZTROLUCZKY Sarolta, Gondolat Kiadó, Bp., 2013.*